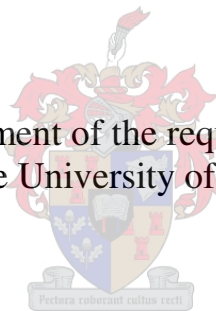


# **More public and less experts: a normative framework for re-connecting the civic work of journalists with the civic work of citizens**

Heiletha Maria Oelofsen

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Supervisor: Mr. Josh Ogada  
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences  
Department of Journalism

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## **Declaration**

By submitting this thesis/dissertation electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

December 2010

**Hierdie studie word opgedra aan my ouers, Calie en Gerhard Potgieter. Hulle nuuskierigheid is die bron van my inspirasie. Roelof Oelofsen is my praatmaat en my man. Hulle almal het my lief of ek 'n graad het of nie. Ek is hulle innig dankbaar.**

## **Abstract**

In a system of representative government, the media is assumed as an important institution to reflect public concerns and holding government accountable for the way in which it addresses these public concerns. Not only is this role imposed by a paradigm which views the media as one of the institutions that sustain and consolidate liberal democracy – the so-called fourth estate alongside the legislative, executive and judicial pillars – but the media itself has conceptualised its identity around the notion that journalists are a “vital part of political life” (Sparks, 1991:58). This study explores the validity of this authority. It suggests that the authority of the media to frame public concerns in a way that is useful for ordinary citizens to “bridge the gap between the private, domestic world and the concerns and activities of the wider society (McQuail, 2005:432)” has been eroded because citizens feel that their concerns and priorities have become secondary to the priorities of powerful state, economic and other “experts” who determine the news agenda. At the same time, there is a general sense that representative government or what is generally known as liberal democracy is losing its currency because citizens have developed a “habit of seeing the political system as indifferent and unresponsive” to their problems and their circumstances (Mathews, 1999:33).

This study explores the potential of a more productive relationship between the media and citizens to rekindle and energise the role of citizens to contribute to the public work of solving common problems that face the wider society.

This study proposes three theoretical frameworks – democratic professionalism, public journalism and deliberative democracy – with the potential to re-conceptualise the way journalists consider their professional role. This re-conceptualisation raises the possibility for re-assessing the political work of journalists *and* the political work of citizens and build new habits of participation and discussion in the political process of communities.

**Key words:** authority, citizenship, civic agency, deliberative democracy, democratic professionalism, identity, objectivity, power, public journalism, public sphere, the public

## Opsomming

In 'n stelsel van verteenwoordigende regering, word die media veronderstel as 'n belangrike instelling om publieke kwessies te weërspeël en die regering verantwoordelik te hou vir die wyse waarop dit hierdie publieke kwessies aanspreek. Hierdie rol word veronderstel in 'n denkraamwerk wat die media beskou as een van die instellings wat liberale demokrasie konsolideer as die sogenaamde “vierde pilaar” neffens die wetgewende, uitvoerende en geregtelike gesag. Die role word verder deur die media self gekonseptualiseer as ‘n identiteit rondom die idee dat joernaliste 'n "belangrike deel is van die politieke lewe" (Sparks, 1991:58).

Hierdie studie ondersoek die geldigheid van hierdie gesag. Die studie dui daarop dat die media gesag het wat die moontlikheid bied om publieke kwessies aan te spreek op 'n manier wat van nut kan wees vir gewone burgers om die kloof tussen die private, huishoudelike wêreld en die sorg en die aktiwiteite van die breër gemeenskap te oorbrug (McQuail, 2005:432). Die gesag word ondermyn omdat gewone burgers voel hulle belange en prioriteite word sekondêr geag aan die magsbelang van die staat en ander "kenners" wat die nuus agenda bepaal. Terselfdertyd is daar 'n algemene persepsie dat verteenwoordigende die regering, of wat algemeen bekend staan as liberale demokrasie, geldigheid verloor omdat burgers voel dat die politieke stelsel onverskillig reageer op die probleme wat hulle ervaar.

Hierdie studie ondersoek die potensiaal van 'n meer werkbare verhouding tussen die media en die burgery om die energie wat burgers in die openbare sfeer kan bydra te ontgin.

Hierdie studie stel drie teoretiese raamwerke voor – demokratiese professionaliteit, openbare joernalistiek en beraadslagende demokrasie – wat moontlikhede bied om opnuut oor die professionele rol van joernaliste te besin. Hierdie “besinning” bied weer nuwe moontlikhede vir die politieke werk van joernaliste en die politieke werk van die burgery. Dit veronderstel nuwe gewoontes van deelname en gesprek in openbare politieke prosesse.

**Slutelwoorde:** beraadslagende demokrasie, burgerlike “agentskap”, burgerskap, demokratiese professionaliteit, identiteit, mag, objektiwiteit, openbare joernalistiek, openbare sfeer, outoriteit, publiek

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

*“Politics and journalism are inseparable; they are perfectly well adapted to one another. They form themselves in relationship to one another. To change journalism is to change politics; to change politics is to change journalism. And they must be thought of together.” (Carey, 1996:67)*

### 1. The problem

In a system of representative government, the media is assumed as an important institution to reflect public concerns and holding government accountable for the way in which it addresses these public concerns. Not only is this role imposed by a paradigm which views the media as one of the institutions that sustain and consolidate liberal democracy – the so-called fourth estate alongside the legislative, executive and judicial pillars – but the media itself has conceptualised its identity around the notion that journalists are a “vital part of political life” (Sparks, 1991:58). This study explores the validity of this authority. It suggests that the authority of the media to frame public concerns in a way that is useful for ordinary citizens to “bridge the gap between the private, domestic world and the concerns and activities of the wider society (McQuail, 2005:432)” has been eroded because citizens feel that their concerns and priorities have become secondary to the priorities of powerful state, economic and other “experts” who determine the news agenda. At the same time, there is a general sense that representative government or what is generally known as liberal democracy is losing its currency because citizens have developed a “habit of seeing the political system as indifferent and unresponsive” to their problems and their circumstances (Mathews, 1999:33).

This study explores the potential of a more productive relationship between the media and citizens to rekindle and energise the role of citizens to contribute to the public work of solving common problems that face the wider society.

Harry Boyte (2004:59) describes public work as “the political activity of citizens as co-creators of democracy”. This is not how most citizens perceive their role in contemporary democracy. Political activity has been narrowed down to voting and something that is set apart from ordinary life and that happens in “a separate realm and a specialized practice (Mathews, 1999:35)”. Citizens have lost faith in their own ability to participate through “conjoint behaviour” and “interconnected action” (Dewey, 1927:23) in “the hard work of democracy”

(Davis, 2010:135). The identity of journalists as “watchdogs” or “guardians” on behalf of citizen interests has become a dominant feature of political reporting and while this is necessary, the glamour associated with exposé type of reporting has made the business of talking to ordinary citizens about their views of public problems pretty much unappealing. The emphasis on scandal and politics as “conflict, confrontation and contest (Mathews, 1999:31)” alienates citizens. It is “a mess” they would rather not be associated with (Mathews, 1999:19).

This scenario requires a revision of the civic work of journalists and the civic work of citizens to sustain and maintain the original vision of representative government as government where elected officials govern *with* citizens not *over* citizens. This study proposes that democracy requires “civic responsibilities” of the media to hold elected officials accountable to citizens. By acting as “bridge agents (Dzur, 2008)” journalists have the potential to connect citizens with government and citizens with other citizens. This potential is undermined by the way journalists have come to perceive their professional identity. Re-examining the identity of journalists in terms of a more civic and citizen-centred approach in favour of a power or expert-oriented approach suggests a re-conceptualisation of the roles of journalists and citizens to deepen democratic process and energize the political public sphere.

## **2. Motivation for the study**

The idea for this study started at a media and democracy workshop in the United States at the Kettering Foundation in Dayton, Ohio in April 2008. In a one day session a small group of journalists and academics from countries representing Africa, South America, Eastern Europe and the United States were asked to consider the following questions: What kind of relationship does democracy require of citizens and the media?; How can media help create a public?; What are the challenges journalists face when trying to engage the public in your work?; If journalism is about informing the public, but there is no public, what is the media’s political work about?

These questions opened up new possibilities for exploring political theory and in particular democratic theory, its relation to media theory and the implications – theoretical and practical – for the work of journalists in the context of democracy and citizenship.

Despite different contexts and different cultures of democratic practice, the countries represented around the table in Dayton faced similar challenges: “People vote but after they have voted they don’t feel their voices are equal”; “the media frame issues on behalf of the elite”; “the media are not reporting about the challenges which face communities in a way citizens



understand the challenges”<sup>1</sup>. The contexts represented were different, yet the experience was the same: neither democracy nor the media are fulfilling the expectations ordinary citizens hope for.

Considering the origins of democratic theory which imagined the role of government, citizens and information or “the press” in perfect symmetry of authority and accountability, the practice shows serious signs of being out of kilter. While democracy is “universally popular” (Dahl, 1989:2), the original role of citizens who actively determine the policy agenda of elected representatives has generally been reduced to voting in pre-determined cycles of election. The original role of the media to provide citizens with information that is useful for critical, rational and *equal* participation in policy debates on the basis of which citizens could take action to change things, has similarly been reduced to a platform where politicians and government officials have access to a disproportionate wedge of the information cake. Citizen voices defining public concerns as they experience them are drowned out by the voices of interest groups, experts and power elites with an attitude which Donaldo Macedo aptly describes in his foreword to Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of Freedom*: “There is no need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself (Freire, 2001:xxvi)”.

This study examines the work of “the public” as envisaged by democratic theory and the role of journalists in “bringing a public into existence” (Dewey, 1927:17). Is “the public” the enfranchised or is universal franchise just the veneer of a political system that promised equal representation but still limits real participation to propertied and educated men? And has the guise of “objectivity” and demands of routines and practices spurred by rapidly changing cultural, economical and technological structures in society compromised the original vision of “the press” as guardians of the values entrenched in representative government? Have journalists convened in the corridors of state and abandoned the sites of citizen politics? Curran (1991:29) argues that the “traditionalist version” in the liberal paradigm of “an ever-vigilant media” policing the “nexus between individuals and the state” has always been undermined by the power inherent in capitalist and patriarchal systems. This study will explore the theme of power in relation to the professional identity of journalists and the civic identity of citizens in more detail.

The idea of active citizenship has been integral to the conception of democracy in Greece and Rome through the republican traditions of Medieval and Renaissance Italy. With the right to speak as an “equal” in the *isegoria* or governing assembly came the responsibility to educate

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<sup>1</sup> Personal notes, conference proceedings

yourself on matters of public concern (Dahl, 1989:14-15). Aristotle defined a good citizen as someone with the “ability both to rule and be ruled” (Aristotle, 1962:110). By the time John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau developed a version of democratic theory that was more appropriate to a polity that extended beyond the borders of city states, access to information became the mechanism through which citizens would hold elected representatives accountable for their task as guardians of their interests. Today, most proponents of the right to freedom of speech, and journalists themselves, see the media as the fourth estate – alongside the executive, the legislature and the judiciary – of the liberal democratic model (Allan, 2004:47). This study proposes that the media is crucial for healthy democratic practice but not necessarily in the mould as envisaged by the first proponents of liberal democratic theory. For the early theorists, like John Stuart Mill, a “rational” and informed electorate was at the heart of a workable democracy. At the time this participation was limited to “men with property and/or formal education (McNair, 2000:18)”. Despite extension of participation in the form of universal voting rights, the perception remains that democracy and the bourgeoisie is a match made in governance heaven. Involving citizens in decision making on a deep and wide scale remains for the most part an illusion. The propertied and the educated still rule Mill’s “market-place of ideas” aided by a media dictated to by the “political economy of the advertising market-place, the cultural diction of mass media and the determining conditions of advanced industrial technology (Phelan, 1991:76)”. A combination of the pretext of “objectivity” and demands of rapidly changing routines and practices of the media – particularly “the press” – resulted in a contestation, if not a crisis, in the way that particularly political journalists perceive their role and professional identity. If the early press shared the mistrust of the early liberal democrats in the capacity of citizens to participate in making decisions about societal problems, the operational context now makes it almost impossible for the media to re-conceptualise their relationship with *all* citizens to “give expression to a richly pluralistic spectrum of information sources (Allan, 2004:47)”. The problem is that in the practice of liberal democratic theory, the identity of the media as an institution related to political life, remains corrupted because of its relation to the power of political life. Instead of connecting to a power base as constituted by citizens, journalists, for the most part, have not moved far from the power bases of the powerful and the bourgeoisie.

Urbanisation, industrialisation and mass communication changed the culture of media usage. The same changes in the cultural landscape and the information options which emerged affected the way in which citizens view the usefulness of the media in their lives. Citizens have become sophisticated users of a range of media and they recognise the interest of power when

they see it portrayed as “news”. This resulted in a reconfiguration of the relationship between journalists and citizens. Chapter one will show how, through current routines and practices forced by institutional changes, journalists have become even more disconnected from the political reality as experienced by citizens and citizens no longer trust journalists to portray their reality. Citizens are cynical about the capacity of journalists to be the guardians of their political interests and journalists are cynical about the capacity of citizens to understand the complexity of their political realities. In this cycle of mistrust the democratic ideal of citizens participating in shaping their societies and their world is in danger.

There is still optimism about the benefits of democratic governance. And there is still consensus that the media and active citizens are vital custodians of a democratic governance system. The ideal is based on a fairly simple assumption: citizens elect representatives and entrust them with power and authority to address public problems on their behalf; the media provide a platform where citizens can voice their particular concerns and where representatives can report back on how and what they are doing to address these concerns. The problem is that this assumption is based on a utopian theory of perfect equilibrium of power as represented by the voices of citizens and power as represented by the voices of elected representatives. The disproportionate power that has come with the office of politics has left citizens cynical about political process. The disregard with which they are treated by representatives once the representatives have been elected has left citizens at the best of times uninterested and at the worst of times, powerless, to participate actively “as co-creators of democracy”. The disregard for citizens from the side of elected representatives is mirrored in the way the media favour voices of power in favour of citizen voices. Citizens now regard the media with the same mistrust and suspicion which they have for elected representatives. They have lost interest in the information which is available to them and have subsequently become disconnected from their stake in political work which is vital for the balance of democratic forces.

### **3. Alternative frameworks for re-connecting the civic work of journalists with the civic work of citizens**

This study considers the potential for journalists to restore the weight of citizen interests in democratic balance by re-assessing the approach of media work through a civic lens. It proposes that a shift in the way journalists consider their professional role could lead to a re-assessment of the political work of journalists *and* the political work of citizens and build new habits of participation, discussion and action in representative democratic process. It further explores the

potential of alternative democratic practice to energise citizens' interest in issues of public concern to deepen political process, make it more collaborative and qualitatively more representative.

The study explores three normative frameworks with a potential to re-conceptualise the way journalists and citizens view their public or political roles in more detail:

- *Democratic professionalism* is a fairly recent development in the field of political theory and addresses the politics of professionalism. It recognizes the “democratic significance” (Dzur, 2008:3) of professions like journalism and proposes that this has implications for the way in which these professionals engage with citizens.
- *Public Journalism*, sometimes called civic journalism, comes from a framework developed by a group of journalists and media academics in the late 1980s proposing that the framing of public issues should place citizens at the centre (Rosen, 1997a:21). While the public journalism movement has been criticized by both scholars and fellow journalists, the approach remains a valuable framework for how the work of journalists can be a catalyst for change by identifying, describing and analyzing social issues in a way that enables citizens to regain political agency and work together to address the problems they face. Jay Rosen and James Carey are the key referents for arguing the potential of public journalism as a framework for the media to re-connect with citizens or connect with citizens in a different way.
- *Deliberative democracy* recognizes the capacity of citizens to organize in a system of self-government, make choices together and face the consequences of these choices (Mathews, 1999:3). It acknowledges the role of journalists as an integral part of this process to “give people voice and enable them to shape their world together (McAfee, 2008:8)”. For an empirical and practical exploration of deliberative democracy David Mathews (1996) is an important reference. Harry Boyte, Benjamin Barber, Noelle McAfee and others provide a theoretical basis for the framework. John Dewey remains an important conversant in the work of all these scholars. Albert Dzur is a key referent for exploring the framework of *Democratic Professionalism* but none of the frameworks stand in isolation. Dzur also provides insights in the framework of deliberation and Boyte's theories on citizenship inform professional identity.

#### **4. The research**

This study explores, through a meta-analysis of alternative frameworks, the potential of journalists to catalyze discussion between citizens and government on matters of public interest. The study shows how the liberal democratic model has evolved in expert-driven political process, how the media have come to mirror the expert-driven model in their own routines and practices and the debilitating results for citizens' perception of their participatory space in identifying and solving public problems.

Key concepts will be explored to illustrate different understandings of politics, democracy, citizenship and professional practice and the implications of this for the work of journalists in a democratic context.

As proposed in the problem statement the study will review and analyse trends and debates in relation to Deliberative Democracy, Public Journalism and Democratic Professionalism as potential normative frameworks to address the challenges as proposed. Discussion of these frameworks will include frameworks which may not be formally defined as "public journalism", "democratic professionalism" or "deliberative democracy" but which nevertheless theorise on the role of journalism, professional identity and democratic practice and its convergence in the realm of active citizenship.

#### **5. Outline of remainder of thesis**

Chapter one provides a comprehensive literature review of the three theoretical frameworks as proposed. Chapter two describes the evolution of liberal democratic theory and the role of citizens and the media in this tradition. Chapter three provides a meta-analysis of literature related to democratic theory, civil society theory and media theory as it relates to democracy, public journalism and professionalism. Chapter four – the concluding chapter, describes the application of the literature to the relationship between citizens and the media and suggests recommendations for further evaluation and practice.

## **Chapter 2: Theoretical frameworks to re-connect the civic work of journalists with the civic work of citizens**

### **1. Introduction**

The work of journalists includes facilitating channels for information that would assist citizens to “learn about the world, debate their responses to it and reach informed decisions about what courses of action to adopt (Dahlgren, 1991:1)”. In this relationship citizens share the responsibility of work in the public domain by getting “back into the system (Mathews, 1999:28)” and help shape the society they want to live in. The challenges to this work, on the side of journalists and citizens, are related to identities that have been shaped by a version of representative government which turned politics into “an activity of specialists and experts” operating in an “instrumentalist setting” and where representation of citizens remains “an abstraction (Barber, 2000:448-449)”.

The identity of journalists is dominated by a view that they perform a vital function in political life. This includes a normative perspective which views “free and independent journalists” as “parts of the political structure” as they form opinions and provide information about the world, activities of politicians and other political and social issues (Sparks, 1991:58). This function holds immense potential to build habits of rational, informed discussion in the sphere where “private people come together as a public” (Habermas, 1989:27) but the function has been eroded by a breakdown in trust between citizens and journalists. This breakdown is in part due to journalists being seen as experts favouring other experts as sources and marginalising the views of citizens – not just in relation to covering of events but also in the investigation of possible solutions to public problem solving. This mirrors technocratic and expert-driven tendencies in government which alienate citizens further from political process.

For journalists to build habits of rational and informed participation of citizens in the public sphere requires a relationship of trust between citizens and journalists. These “bonds of confidence” (Waisbord, 2006:77) are complex and rest on more than good performance from the side of journalists. Part of the problem is that some normative features which used to constitute connections of trust, like “neutral, informative reporting of events” (McQuail, 2005:355), the “occupational ideology” of objectivity (Deuze, 2005:443) have become compromised or have lost currency as a result of perceptions that the “passive role” of neutrally conveying competing views have translated in reflecting the views of those who are able to voice their arguments most effectively (Veltmer, 2006:3). This model of journalists as neutral, objective observers – which

is part of a liberal understanding of media in liberal democracy – has proven inadequate if the media are to play a role in strengthening the kind of civic voice that is necessary in political systems where popular decision making is part of the political process and where the “competence and rationality of citizens is of utmost importance” (Veltmer, 2006:4). Features of neutrality and objectivity have become part of a professional tradition that makes assumptions about what constitutes a trustworthy relationship with citizens. Waisbord (2006:76-7) argues that one example of such an assumption is that “watchdog reporting” contributes positively to public trust. He points to evidence in Latin America which shows that public trust was high at times when journalists exposed corruption and while the media continued these exposés public trust diminished considerably. Dzur (2008:138 - 139) describes the unravelling of these “bonds of confidence” by referring to the 1988 presidential campaign in the United States. Despite (or because of?) a “highly calculated political discourse” which was also carried through the media, voter turnout was dismal. “[This] reinforced a growing sense among journalists that a large part of the public had become alienated from politics (Dzur, 2008:139).” The alienation from politics becomes an economic problem. As people lose interest in public affairs they lose interest in buying newspapers. Sustaining a relationship of trust is at the heart of the professional identity of journalists. The public seems to care more than journalists imagine about how stories are framed or how news agendas are developed.

In the ever evolving work of democracy the professional habits of journalists to frame events in terms of expert views and what experts planned to do (Cunningham, 2003:29), have come to mirror the technocratic and expert-driven approaches of political and government leaders. In the same way that this approach to politics has resulted in a disconnection between citizens and government, this approach has driven a wedge between citizens and journalists. This mode of news production has created an impression that journalists “give meaning to their newswork” (Deuze, 2005:444) solely from an expert perspective. Instead of relying on journalists to protect their interests “over and above the mere aggregation of particularistic interests” (Veltmer, 2006:5) citizens now view journalists as part of a “powerful class of knowing people” who “decode and interpret the universe of knowledge” (Petersen, 2003:255) on their behalf.

This information model renders the media as “a major political actor with tremendous power” (Mathews, 1994:19) and reduces citizens to the disempowering position of “eavesdroppers” on a “conversation between experts” (Campbell, 2000:691). This denies the

potential of citizens to contribute to political process “as experts in their own lives and as authorities on their own aspirations” (Campbell, 2000:691).

## **2. The alienating effect of expert-driven democratic representation**

“We complained about poor service delivery and what we got was an IDP<sup>2</sup>”. This statement by a protestor in Phumelela township, quoted in a *Business Day* article (Bernstein, 2007) based on a Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE) report, is most telling of the technocratic approach that has come to characterize the South African government’s approach to solving the problems of service delivery. In the article, Bernstein (2007) quotes the Phumelela protestor to illustrate the “gap between the world of expensive consultants who draw up plans and move on and the reality of citizens’ daily lives”. In the report the Centre recommends that the government should re-examine the “national department’s fixation on paper IDPs”.

Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) have become one of the modes in a technocratic problem solving approach that leaves citizens feeling “removed from government” and, while demanding more, feel less willing to make a contribution “through their own action and initiative (Memela, Mautjane, Nzo, & Van Hoof, 2008:1)”.

This failure of realising a democratic utopia where all citizens – including decision makers, experts – have equal power in shaping the state is of course not peculiar to South Africa. Globally, at a time when democratic ideals are promoted enthusiastically and in some cases even imposed by force, states grapple with the meaning of democracy. Democracy may manifest in different forms but it remains a “public ideal” (Fischer, 2003:45) and the “unexpected magnitude” of emerging democracies in Eastern Europe, Russia, Latin America and Africa offer new opportunities for scholars to study transitions and develop new understandings for the configuration of citizens, governments and political parties (Veltmer, 2006:1-2) and the role of journalists in this configuration.

In South Africa, the institutional demands on government to transform from apartheid to a country “characterized by the antithesis of all that was bad” about that system (Ramphela, 2008:13) are enormous and tensions between the state and its citizens during the transformation process are to be expected. What is unexpected, after a long and proud history of active citizen participation in undoing the apartheid system, is the lack of a public sphere – in both the

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<sup>2</sup> Local municipalities in South Africa have to use “integrated development planning” or IDP as a method to plan future development in their areas <http://www.etu.org.za/toolbox/docs/localgov/webidp.html#planning>



Habermasian sense of *lexis* or discussion and *praxis* or common action (Habermas, 1989:3) – providing citizens with opportunities to contribute as equal partners in the transformation project.

Instead of building on and sustaining the features of the public sphere that did exist in the arena of contestation before 1994 and actively pursuing the potential of creating novel features for a public sphere appropriate to the demands of the emerging South African democracy, the government increasingly defines its governance role in technical terms and relies on expert consultants to determine the priorities of services to citizens.

Media scholars (Jacobs, 2002; Wasserman & De Beer, 2006) illustrate a similar approach to changes in the media environment, which important as they are to democratise the media landscape, remain largely fixated on legislative and corporate adjustments with very little to back it up in terms of how these changes fundamentally serve the interest of “nation” and “public” (Wasserman & De Beer, 2006:70).

Jacobs (2002:2-3) makes the link between the power of experts and ideology when he analyses media ownership patterns, profit motives, employment practices and the commercialization of the public broadcaster in terms of a neo-liberal “brand of democracy” which favours individual rights and a diminished role for the state. Instead of “providing sites where citizens can engage in the political process” this ideological model demobilizes people and limits their participation in political process to election cycles (2002:9-10).

In this scenario, citizens become clients or customers or, in the words of Derrida (2003:36)<sup>3</sup> “the silhouette of a phantom, the haunting fear of democratic consciousness”. Clients or customers suggest a different relationship with decision makers and political leaders than citizens. Ruiters (2006:129) argues that South Africa’s public service charter, Batho Pele (People First), introduced a “customer discourse” and “terminology not usually associated with public goods discourse”. This includes references to citizens as “users of services”, “customer surveys”, “globally competitive services” and “value for money” to name but a few. The problem with this application of free market principles to delivery functions of the state is that this configuration of the state as business and citizens as customers results in divisions, which cannot easily be bridged with democratic values, like transparency, accountability or a free press. The state in this instance takes on the identity of the technical expert who keeps customers satisfied. Citizens,

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<sup>3</sup> This essay is drawn from an interview Olivier Salvatori and Nicolas Weill conducted with Derrida in 1988. The interview first appeared in English in the book, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today’s Europe*, translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael B. Naas. The article was published in the *Kettering Review* with permission from the Indiana University Press.

instead of seeing themselves as co-creators of public goods, take on an identity that is limited to being users of services defined merely in terms of satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Strom, 2005:2). Tasked with responsibilities that are increasingly of a technical nature requiring specialised expertise, government has come to view citizens as uneducated and ignorant of what it really takes to “manage” a country.

Citizens respond by withdrawing from participation in political process. Taking voter turnout as a measure of political participation, an SABC/Markinor survey (quoted in Barchiesi, 2004:2) shows the percentage of eligible South African voters who exercise their vote dropped from 85 percent in 1994, 64 percent in 1999 to 58 percent in 2004. This is just the thin end of a more worrying general trend of South African citizens losing interest in participating and interacting with government. Results of the Afrobarometer survey (Mattes, 2002:32) – a regular 20 country measure of Africans’ views on democracy, markets and civil society – shows six percent of respondents reporting contact with a government or party leader in the previous year and ten percent reporting contact with a community leader. These results are the lowest for this survey category in southern Africa and has led Mattes to conclude that South Africans have become “one of the most passive citizenries in southern Africa (2002:32)”. This, despite South Africa’s reputation as being one of the strongest democracies on the continent.

A survey by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) shows a “worrisome reversal (Roberts, 2008)” in citizens’ trust in public institutions: between 2004 and 2007 trust in local and national government and in Parliament dropped by 20 percent and trust in political parties dropped by 16 percent. This is a further indication of a widening gap between citizens and government. Protest action by citizens in Phumelela and Khutsong over lack of services and the countrywide xenophobic attacks on migrants in the first half of 2008 carry the hallmark signs of action by citizens who feel disempowered and marginalised in decision making processes.

In his classic consideration of citizen capacity in state matters, *Public Opinion*, Lippmann (1922:17) dismissed the capacity of the public to have a “competent opinion” on public affairs as an “intolerable and unworkable fiction”. His prognosis was that citizens at their best were prone to manipulation and at worst overwhelmed by public affairs and too incompetent to grasp the complexities of their own problems to do something about it. The political world, he suggested, was “out of reach, out of sight, out of mind” of most citizens and should be left to the “expert organization”. But as Cortés (1996:48) points out, not only do experts often lack the answers to the “complex technical questions” confronting public life but they have also proved to be prone to be guided by ideology in their choices while pretending to be led by neutral and scientific

expertise. Which is why citizen participation to contribute “normatively to the legitimization of policy development and implementation” is so important ( Cortés, 1996:46).

When citizens accept or take on the identity of customers they abdicate their responsibility as co-creators of a democratic society to the experts. Corrupted by “powerlessness ( Cortés, 1996:37)” they doubt their own capacity and agency to make constructive contributions and to be partners in making the whole society work better.

### **3. The alienating effect of expert-driven journalism**

Lippmann was as pessimistic about the ability of journalists to contribute to public life as he was of citizens. Like the public, Lippmann suggested, newspapers could not be trusted with task of expressing competent opinion and therefore “public opinions must be organized for the press if they are to be sound, not by the press as is the case today (Lippmann, 1922:17)”. This pretty much set the tone for a professional mode which is alive and well almost a century later.

There is evidence of a growing disconnect between the South African media and citizens. The institutional framework that governs the South African media as described by Jacobs (2002:2-9) and Wasserman & De Beer (2006:60-72) explain some, if not all of this discontent. Fourie (2003:154) quotes a survey from the SABC 2000/2001 annual report (this data do not appear in later annual reports) which shows that only 19 percent of the adult population believes newspapers are a credible source of news. While the same survey shows that citizens do consider the South African Broadcasting Corporation as a credible source of news, this trust is also waning. The report quoted by Fourie reflects survey results for 2000/01 at 91 percent for adults regarding news from the public broadcaster as “most believable”. The HSRC survey (Roberts, 2008) quoted earlier in this article, measuring the level of trust in public institutions, found that in 2003, 75 percent of citizens said they trusted the SABC as a public institution and by 2006 this dropped to 72 percent. While the instruments for the SABC survey quoted by Fourie and the HSRC survey may have measured different aspects of trust and therefore presented different results, it is still fair to concur that in terms of the broad concepts underpinning trust as a value, the trend is downwards.

This is part of a global decline of citizen confidence in the media. In Latin America opinion polls in the 1980s and 1990s showed levels of trust ranging between 80 and 90 percent. By the first half of the new millennium these levels have slipped to around fifty percent (Waisbord, 2006:76). Merritt (1995:xv) cites a *Yankelovich Monitor* survey which shows that US

citizens' confidence in television and print media declined by more than fifty percent in the five-year period 1988-1993: television from 55 to 25 percent; newspapers from fifty to twenty percent and magazines from 38 to 12 percent. From this Merritt concludes: "People will not place trust in something they feel is not helpful to them in solving their problems."

Journalists are not unwilling to work with and on behalf of citizens. In their book, *The Elements of Journalism*, Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007:5-6) refer to citizens twice in what the authors propose to be the ten elements of journalism or the "principles that have helped both journalists and the people in self-governing systems to adjust to the demands of an ever more complex world". The first reference is in terms of journalists' relationship to citizens: "Its first loyalty is to citizens." The second reference is a new addition to the original nine elements that they proposed in the first edition of the book: "Citizens, too, have rights and responsibilities when it comes to the news". These are important indicators of the primary relationship that guides news selection and presentation: "the god term of journalism ... the public (Carey, 1987:5)".

Why is it then that, despite the intentions of journalists to do their work in the interest of citizens – as "watchdogs", as the "fourth estate" – there seems to be a persistent cloud of mistrust hanging over the relationship between citizens and journalists?

The tension journalists experience between being engaged while at the same time keeping an "objective" and "neutral" distance, may answer part of the question. McQuail (2005:563) concedes that objectivity may be a "theoretically contested" term but he maintains that, for most journalists it lies at the heart of their professional relationship of "trust and reliability" with media users. While these may be normative standards of good reporting, these standards, paradoxically, could also be blamed for the breakdown of trust between journalists and the public. It is not that objectivity and neutrality have become invalid standards for good journalism. The problem is, that in a news environment driven by the pressures inherent in a framework of political economy, these standards have become the thin end of "both sides of the story" when journalists, forced by urgency to get the story and get it out before anyone else, now favour expert sources because information from these sources is readily available and usually reliable and credible enough to fulfil the be-all and end-all requirement of "balanced reporting". This has perpetuated a habit of "spending too much time with power brokers and not enough time with ordinary citizens (Elshtain, 1996:24)" and, instead of seeing journalists as guardians of the public and therefore also their interest, citizens see journalists as "conduits for relaying truth arrive at ... by the experts (Carey, 1987:7)".

#### 4. Democratic professionalism as an alternative to expert-driven approaches

Trust between journalists and citizens, says Waisbord (2006:77) can not be understood simply in terms of how journalists serve democratic goals by holding governments accountable through investigative reporting. Neither can it be based on assumptions of what constitutes professional authority when performance standards are “unilaterally determined by journalists or press analysts (Waisbord, 2006:77)”. Waisbord continues to argue:

*“Trust in the press rests on specific expectations and whether those expectations are met. Consequently, for the press (or a specific news organisation) to be trusted, it does not necessarily have to perform according to prescriptions of what ‘the good journalism’ should be. Rather, it needs to meet citizens’ expectations, which may or may not resemble any of the requirements established in press models.”*

These assumptions of “professional authority” have always been, at best, rather “ambiguous (Dzur, 2008:135)” and at worst, quite divisive in how it manifests in schisms between journalists writing for “educated people who prefer thoughtful political and economic coverage” and those who cover the “popular crime-scandal-celebrity mix (Thisela, 2005:58)”.

Democratic professionalism forces journalists (and other professions such as the judiciary and health care) to reconsider existing performance models and commit to sharing authority and knowledge in order to become “enabling intermediaries between citizens and the social and political institutions that affect them (Dzur, 2008:136)”.

While the debilitating effect of expert-driven technocratic approaches has been the focus of scholarly critique for a number of years, the ability of professional actors to “expand rather than shrink democratic authority (Dzur, 2004:6)” has been unexplored. Democratic professionalism proposes that journalists count among these professional actors with a democratic responsibility to “enable rather than disable citizen participation within their spheres of professional authority (Dzur, 2004:6)”. This approach, says Rosen (1996:26) requires of professionals to reconsider their relationship with citizens: do journalists “know” on behalf of citizens because citizens are incapable of knowing or “is the professional the full-time inhabitant of a world that everyone ought to inhabit part-time as a citizen to make sense of problems and choices?”

Democratic professionalism is not a “deprofessionalization or anti-institution movement (Dzur, 2008:3)”. Rather, it values the specialized knowledge required to do a particular job while

at the same time using and sharing this knowledge to build “well-integrated political communities organized around a knowledgeable citizenry (Fischer, 2003:47)”. At the same time it acknowledges the specialized knowledge that exists among citizens and adopts an approach that galvanizes that knowledge and cultivates confidence in citizens’ civic competency instead of an approach that undermines citizens’ trust in their own and the capacity of collective action with fellow citizens (Dzur, 2008:95-6).

## **5. The potential of public journalism to re-connect citizens and journalists**

Spending time with citizens or citizen connectedness is the rallying point of public journalism as a professional movement and a theoretical departure point. Sometimes called civic journalism, this model comes from a framework developed by a group of journalists and media academics in the late 1980s proposing that the framing of public issues should place citizens at the centre (Rosen, 1997a:21). While the public journalism movement has been critiqued by both scholars and fellow journalists, the approach remains a valuable framework for how the work of journalists can be a catalyst for change by identifying, describing and analyzing social issues in a way that enables citizens to regain political agency and work together to address the problems they face. Jay Rosen, one of the main advocates and scholars of public journalism describes the central theme of public journalism as the notion that “journalists are members of the political community, citizens themselves and not bystanders to *our* public life (1997a:3 personal emphasis)”.

From the perspective of “deeply entrenched professionalism” public journalism’s call for a more active role for journalists in supporting civic involvement, even going as far as including citizens in the development of news stories look “propagandistic (St. John, 2007:249)”. But far from being propagandistic or compromising objectivity and neutrality Rosen argues that public journalism “strives for a deeper level of fairness” by consciously considering the framing power of news. He talks about a “positioning effect” of news stories (1997a:18-19) and maintains that journalists routinely make decisions about how to portray people in news coverage as “fans, victims, celebrants, consumers or sentimentalists”. In this regard, reporting on HIV and AIDS is a good example of how journalists have consciously opted for positioning people infected with the AIDS virus as “people living with AIDS” or “living positively” rather than people dying from a terminal illness. In this case “positioning” has never been regarded as compromising objectivity or neutrality but rather as a device for deepening or broadening understanding for the

affected subjects in the stories. Similarly, public journalism proposes that journalists consciously frame or “position” citizens at the centre of political process. The alternative, says Rosen, is a “balanced” story which often perpetuates people in a position of “helpless spectators” because there is “no room for ambivalence, no place where many of us might want to stand (Rosen, 1997a:19)”.

This willingness to produce news from the place where citizens may stand and not from where the experts stand may be public journalism’s most valuable contribution to get journalists to reconsider their “aversion to civic engagement (St. John, 2007:250)”. It is an attitude that holds democratic hope for the practical potential of journalists to be catalysts of change when they enter into a “reciprocal (Derrida, 2003:42)” relationship with fellow citizens. Chomsky (1996:50) suggests that, in a democratic society, the media would be under “public control”. This, according to him, means that the public will participate – “to the extent that people want to be involved”. McAfee (2008:14) considers two possible ways of viewing the media when she distinguishes between a “cynical” and a “hopeful” narrative of democracy – the former stemming from the philosophic traditions of, among others, Lippmann, and the latter from, among others, the philosopher John Dewey who was Lippmann’s peer but held more hope for the capacity of citizens to make a contribution to public life. In McAfee’s distinction, the cynical version of democracy includes a view of the media as a manipulative force; in the hopeful version the media “provide ways for people to communicate, to make their inner worlds part of a public and human world, to help shape and direct the public world (McAfee, 2008:13)”. This description captures the ideals and the practice of a public journalism approach. It is an approach that is committed to finding practical ways of developing professional habits that connect journalists to the civic and political process of citizens in their communities<sup>4</sup>. It changes the relationship of journalists from working *for* citizens to *with* citizens and rather than *leading* the public to *facilitating* understanding of public issues and political process. It is, as Merritt puts it, “an attitude that becomes a way of doing, not simply a way of doing (1997:27)”.

The “way of doing”, or putting the approach in practice is the challenge. Rosen suggests that framing stories in a way that “fortify public life, civil participation and deliberative dialogue” is the key to the pragmatic value of public journalism (1997a:15). Journalism as a profession is steeped in a gatekeeper tradition where journalists “filter through the happenings of

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<sup>4</sup> For the purpose of this article Cortés’ (1996a:32) definition of politics applies: “...Politics is about relationships that enable people to disagree, argue, interrupt, confront and negotiate and, through this process of conversation and debate, to forge consensus or compromise that makes it possible for them to act.”

the world, select the significant events, and report them for their audience (Nip, 2006:216)". And while it may be "an idea seeking meaningful application rather than a set of operational principles or set of rules (Merritt, 1997:27)" it is important to generate more research to empirically assess this approach and its potential impact. Bare (1998:85), suggests three areas of inquiry: editorial content, practice and behaviour of journalists in gathering and reporting news and attitudes and beliefs of reporters and editors.

A review of the institutional environment in which journalists work starts with the consideration of the "political implications of [their] professional knowledge and practice (Dzur, 2008:6)". Journalists, says Katz, should spend time in those "central" and "dispersed spaces" of participatory democracy "dedicated to the polity as a whole and ... to the citizens' need to know what like- or right-minded others are thinking (1996:23)". Both these views suggest that journalists, as citizens, cannot escape or avoid being part of the "meta-narrative of empire and control". They are not distant bystanders or detached observers of political process, they are part of it, they contribute to it, and they are at the very heart of what this political process should and could look like.

## **6. Deliberative democracy as a framework to re-conceptualise the work of citizens in political process**

If Lippmann found citizens incapable of participating in democratic decision making, his peer and critic, John Dewey took the opposite view. Rosen (1996:24) describes Dewey's proposal of democracy as public "intelligence" that will emerge under conditions which are co-created by citizens as a "path of democratic hope". This suggests a democratic role for citizens that go beyond voting. It is the hard work of defining problems, making choices, taking action and reflecting on the consequences of these actions with other citizens. Where citizens abdicate this work to politicians or other experts – including the media – citizens are marginalized from, but also marginalise themselves from political process. This undermines the potential of democracy as a system of "self government (Coetzee & Graham, 2002:4-5)".

Deliberative democracy as a model for citizen participation in political process has been the focus of democratic theorists since the 1990s (Dzur, 2008:14). Also described as a movement, (Gastil & Keith, 2005:3) this model accepts the value of systematic and planned opportunities for citizens to discuss public, and by implication, political, issues. Citizens, even when voting patterns or other opportunities for political participation suggest otherwise, want to



be involved in political process and deliberative democracy offers them a way back into the system (Mathews, 1999:28). McAfee (2005:91-99) distinguishes three models of democratic deliberation:

- A preference-based model in which citizens see democracy as a means to maximise individual preferences and where the purpose of deliberation is developing individual opinions and preferences
- A rational proceduralist model which specifies “rational” and “acceptable” reasoning and procedures to ensure a positive result; and
- An integrative model which sees deliberation as a process in which participants “grapple” with choices for solving public problems not through considering their individual preference but in terms of effect on the whole community.

The integrative model is the model that holds most promise for “common ground for action” but McAfee warns that this approach does not aim for “happy consensus”. Rather, it requires the “pragmatic task of delineating what courses of action might work given polity members’ many aims and constraints” and the hard work of “fathoming problems and forming a public that can respond (McAfee, 2005:100)”. This suggests citizens at work or as Elshtain puts it:

*“Democracy is about an ethos, it is a way of responding, it is the emergence of civically shaped characters. And to be one such you have to get out of the house and into the community” (1996:32).”*

## **Chapter 3: The conception and evolution of democracy and citizenship as a contextual basis for the role of the media**

*“The role of the media in contemporary politics forces us to ask what kind of a world and what kind of society we want to live in, and in particular in what sense of democracy do we want this to be a democratic society (Chomsky, 1991:9).”*

### **1. Introduction**

This chapter explores the history of theories and practice of democracy, citizenship and information or the media in this context to provide a rationale for the media as a political force in representative government. The particular focus is on the historical principles of democratic theory and practice and how these presumed a participatory role for citizens through information, communication and the media.

The second section traces the evolution of the same three themes from the late 19<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The lasting impact of industrialisation and subsequent urbanisation on democratic practice, perceptions of citizenship – both by citizens of themselves and of citizens by elected representatives – and the culture of communication is the basis of this demarcation. This chapter also considers the ontological assumptions, past and present, about democracy, citizens and communication and how these forces converge in the public realm.

While there is agreement about interrelatedness, the nature of democracy, the definition of citizenship and the role of communication in effecting the conceptual purpose of citizens and the media have become contested notions among communities of researchers. The contestation revolves mainly around notions of power, agency and authority. These themes determine the epistemological perspectives of the normative frameworks proposed in chapter one of this study. Power, agency and authority will be discussed in greater detail in chapter three along with other key concepts which emerge as part of this study.

### **2. Historical overview of democratic theory and practice**

Aristotle defined a “statesman” or “the art of statesmanship” as “one who rules and who is ruled in return (Aristotle:375)”. Despite the exclusion of slaves and women from the entitlement to “rule in return” Aristotle’s conception of political rule holds the promise of equality in its vision that the needs of the polis supersede the needs of the individual and that a “good life” or

the “perfect association” in the “polis” or city-state rests on “individuals ... equally depending on the whole (Aristotle:377-379)”. It is important to note that Aristotle’s vision is not about transcending the “individual”. The individual is a vital part of “the whole”. But the needs of the polis – the “perfect association” – are dependent on individuals acting beyond their own needs to serve the good of the polis. The limits of individualism, personal freedom and what it means for a citizen to be part of “the whole” has been a fundamental discourse in democratic theory since Aristotle. These themes resonate with the notion of citizenship as proposed in deliberation theory and with the expert identity of professionals – in the case of this study, journalists – as proposed in the frameworks of democratic professionalism and public journalism.

Another Aristotelian vision, which is still fundamental to a modern understanding of democracy, is the belief that “a sovereign people is not only entitled to govern itself but possesses all the resources and institutions necessary to do so (Dahl, 1989:1)”. This view is key to the argument in this study that this vision of democracy is being undermined in contemporary democratic practice because of a disregard for the civic work of citizens and a bias in favour of technocratic and institutional resources offered by professionals and experts.

Dahl distinguishes four foundations for democratic practice. Three of these have been developed through or at least described by democratic theory. The first source of the democratic state, says Dahl, was the Greek and Roman city-states. The second foundation of democratic practice and theory is the republican tradition following the city-states of Rome and Italy through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The third basis or source of democratic practice and theory is marked by the separation of power in judicial, legislative and executive institutions of government and the last foundation embodies what Dahl describes as the “logic of political equality (1989:1)”.

The approach to government characterised by the republican transformation is relevant for the purpose of this study in its treatment of citizen authority and capacity to participate in government. While republicanism has a lot in common with the Greek city-state in its vision of the equation between good citizens and the common good of the polis and equality of all citizens, at least before the law, republicanism introduced a modicum of scepticism for civic virtue. Republicans believed that while civic virtue was important there needed to be checks and balances to counter the “fragility” of civic virtue. Constitutions now acknowledged that “the people” is not “a perfectly homogenous body” and ensured that the interests of “the few” (meaning the aristocracy or monarchs) and “the many” (meaning ordinary people) were protected and balanced. The particular relevance of this foundational phase of democracy for the

purpose of this study is the contrasting views within the republican tradition in the perspective on the role of citizens in democracy. Aristocratic republicans or conservative republicans want a constitution that limits the role of citizens in government because they fear the “impulses of the many”. Democratic republicans on the other hand are more concerned about constitutional power that protects against the abuse of power on the side of “the few (Dahl, 1989:24-27)”. These demarcations have implications for citizen identities that continue to problematise habits of citizen participation in democratic process today. The mistrust implied in the fear of the “impulses of the many” persists in expert-driven modes of government suggesting that citizens cannot be trusted to contribute to civic work or in the vocabulary of Aristotle: to the “common good”. The mistrust implied in the fear of exploitation by “the few” continues to contribute to and perpetuates cynicism which alienates citizens from political process.

Representative government is the third source of democratic theory proposed by Dahl. From the perspective of modern democratic theory and practice it is almost unfathomable that representation as envisaged in the Greek and Roman city-states could persist for more than three centuries. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century the Puritans tentatively raised the question of responsiveness and legitimacy of representation in their search for a republican alternative to monarchy but it was only in the 18<sup>th</sup> century that Montesquieu seriously raised the impossibility of democratic practice based on a city-state reality when national interests were expanding way beyond the borders of the sites of Aristotle’s original vision (Dahl, 1989:28). John Locke, who is regarded as one of the fathers of liberal democracy (Bodlaender, 1959:265; McNair, 2000:16-17), emphasises the right of all citizens to be free and equal before the law (Bodlaender, 1959:266). Although Locke raises the possibility of majority consent to representatives, he doesn’t fundamentally question the practice of representation limited to those citizens who are present in the polis – “perfectly in line with the traditional view (Dahl, 1989:28)”. Locke’s theories do however provide a basis for Montesquieu to develop his theory on three distinct powers of government – judicial, legislative and executive (Bodlaender, 1959:321)– that would not only solve the problem of representativeness in the new scale of democracy that has outgrown the city-state but lay the foundation for contemporary democratic governance (Dahl, 1989:29). The notion of Montesquieu that citizens elect representatives to fulfil the legislative function formerly served through direct presentation by those citizens who attended the relevant meetings in the polis surmounted the challenge of scale that has become untenable as “popular government” moved out of the “sphere of the polis (Habermas, 1989:3)” to the “larger domain”

of the nation state (Dahl, 1989:30). While the new system held enormous promise for citizens to govern themselves it was not a system without problems.

*“The institutions of representative democracy removed government so far from the direct reach of the demos that one could reasonably wonder, as some critics have, whether the new system was entitled to call itself by the venerable name of democracy (Dahl, 1989:30).”*

This study proposes that the “new and highly complex constellation of political institutions (Dahl, 1989:30)” still pose a challenge today to realise the promise of citizen participation in democratic practice. The separation of powers introduced a different set of checks and balances to protect different interests in the democratic state but it also institutionalised the identity of citizens as “the electorate” which limits the definition and possibilities of civic and public work. As political communication becomes more sophisticated to serve the election cycle the division between public relations and publicity on the one hand and news on the other becomes more blurred. In this configuration the voice of citizens and finally the interest of citizens are usurped by political elites and other experts.

Dahl’s proposal for a fourth source of democratic practice explores the question of how and why people spontaneously, without precedent of democratic practice or the spur of democratic theory, use democratic principles to organise decision making about common and public problems. He proposes that this history of democratic systems developing on the accord of citizens deciding “logically” on government by the people for the people shows an inherent confidence on the part of citizens that they are “equally qualified to govern (Dahl, 1989:30-32)”. Dahl is quick to suggest that this does not imply that people are necessarily logical in political matters but it does suggest that the principle of equal ability to govern “is well within the reach of ordinary human beings”.

As argued before, this study proposes that the confidence of citizens in their ability to participate actively in democratic practice has been eroded by an expert-driven approach in government that has been evident in democratic practice since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The next section will focus on the development of the notion of citizenship and civic work and how theoretical and practical experience have shaped the identity of citizens in contemporary society.

### 3. The role of citizens or notions of citizenship in the conception of democratic theory and practice

*“For ideas belong to human beings who have bodies, and there is no separation between the structures and processes of the part of the body that entertains the ideas and the part that performs acts (Dewey, 1927:8).”*

While citizenship and the citizen is intertwined with the conception of democracy it is important, for the purpose of this study, to analyse the evolution of notions of citizenship and the role of citizens on the trajectory of democratic theory and practice. This will uncover and provide clues to how we have arrived at the problematic juncture proposed in this study where citizens feel alienated from government and disempowered to actively participate in political process.

The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines citizen as an “inhabitant or freeman of city” and “townsman (“The Concise Oxford dictionary of current English,” 1964:182)”. The Oxford Thesaurus (Urdang, 1991:58) adds “voter”, “householder”, “resident”, “inhabitant”; all of which suggest that the idea of the citizen as a political unit operating on a local or city-state level still persists. This local identity of a citizen harks back to the conception of citizenship in the Greek and Roman city-states where the “profound” belief in direct government made it difficult for the Greeks to consider representative government (Dahl, 1989:19). Dahl rightly warns against confusing the ideal vision of the citizen of Greek democracy with the reality of political life in the city state. The ideal vision looks something like this:

*“...the citizen is a whole person for whom politics is a natural social activity not sharply separated from the rest of life, and for whom government and the state – or rather, the polis – are not remote and alien entities distant from oneself. Rather, political life is only an extension of, and harmonious with, oneself. Values are not fragmented but coherent: for happiness is united with virtue, virtue with justice, and justice with happiness (Dahl, 1989:18).”*

While evidence of practice is scant, there is no reason to believe that citizens in the city-states of Greeks were less concerned with their own interests and more dedicated to the “public good” than citizens in modern democracies. Participation was stymied by the same forces of vested power and authority found in contemporary society (Dahl, 1989:21). Wealth and “control over labor (sic) power” legitimised active citizenship – that is access to the decision making

realm or the *bios politikos* in the *agora* or market place (Habermas, 1989:3). In the 18<sup>th</sup> century leading up to the French Revolution power and authority to participate in public decision making by virtue of inheritance of either money or aristocratic status started to be challenged. John Locke's theory of representative democracy and what seems to have become its economic counterpart – capitalism – challenged autocratic power proposing that the “status of capital earned in the marketplace” should be recognised rather than status of inherited capital (McNair, 2000:16-17). For citizens or “private people” the public sphere becomes a space from which it was now possible to form a public that started to infringe on the authority the ruling class was wielding in the public sphere up to then (Habermas, 1989:25). “The *publicum* developed into the public, the *subjectum* into the [reasoning] subject, the receiver of regulations from above into the ruling authorities' adversary (Habermas, 1989:26).”

In Habermas's analysis this marks the starting point of “critical reasoning of private persons on political issues (1989:29)”. “Critical reasoning” suggests activity and “work” on the part of citizens. Instead of being subjugated to authorities, citizens insisted – culminating in the call for liberty, equality and fraternity – on making equal contributions to government. Montesquieu's theory of a legislative arm representing the popular voice through elections overcame the problem of scale presented by the democratic vision of Greece and Rome. The right of the many to speak as equals in the *isegoria* or governing assembly was now institutionalised and taking on a life of its own in the different contexts of the nation states of the modern world.

With the right to participate came the responsibility of civic work. The responsibility of citizens to be educated on matters of public concern was a vision of the Greek city-state (Dahl, 1989:14-15). Habermas's seminal work, *The structural transformation of the public sphere*, provides a number of clues for the forces dictating the nature of the political or public work of citizens from the Greek city-state through to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. First, the notion that citizenship or being a citizen involves action both in private and public capacity by ordinary people is a central theme in Habermas's analysis of the nature of and transformation of the public sphere. “The public sphere was realized not in the republic of scholars alone but in the public use of reason by all who were adept at it (Habermas, 1989:105).” In the “golden age” between the Regency and the Revolution preparation for civic work started in the “social structures of the public sphere (Habermas, 1989:36)” constituted by the salons, the coffee houses, literary journals and periodicals. These were the “literary precursor” where the “bourgeois avant-garde of the

educated middle class” honed their critical-rational skills for debate in the political public sphere (Habermas, 1989:29).

The right to vote for representatives as envisaged in John Locke’s liberal democratic theory put an even bigger onus on citizens to participate and be active in political process. Being informed and being able to participate “rationally” was what made democracy in this sense “real (McNair, 2000:17)”. While the focus on individual freedom and individual rights is a strong characteristic of liberal democracy the ability of individual citizens to “act *collectively* in making decisions about who will govern them (McNair, 2000:18)” is as central a tenet for the political process to deliver on its promise of making good on the will of the people. This collective action happens in the public sphere where private and individual political opinions become the public opinion which eventually reflects in voting behaviour of the electorate (McNair, 2000:18-19). By the 19<sup>th</sup> century the signs were there that public sphere would no longer be controlled by the bourgeoisie or property owners but would come under the control of groups who had no control over property. “When they as an enlarged public, came to the fore as the subject of the public sphere in place of the bourgeoisie, the structure of this sphere would have to be transformed from the ground up (Habermas, 1989:127).” This “democratically revolutionized” public sphere wished to substitute the “fictitious civil society of the legislature” with a “real civil society” that becomes a “sphere of public deliberation and resolution concerning the direction and administration of every process necessary for the reproduction of society (Habermas, 1989:127)”. In this state it could be what it promised to be from the start – “a domination of human beings over human beings, to reason (Habermas, 1989:128)”.

Citizen participation had now been institutionalised through elected government but the authority of participation was – and still is – blurred and bedevilled by a discourse about the source of decision making power. While liberal democratic theory prescribed equality before the law and implied equality in public decision making but equal rights, access to the public sphere voting was mostly limited to property owners (Dahlgren, 1991:4).

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century John Dewey and Walter Lippmann explored the potential contribution of citizens as “reasonable human beings” to democratic government. Their views on citizen involvement in public or civic work are rooted in the debate about the inherent capacity of all people to participate with equal authority in political process as imagined in representative democracy. Lippmann believed that while citizens have an interest in public affairs, preoccupation with their private lives, limited attention span and “constant interruption” affect their capacity to participate in public decision making (Lippmann, 1922:31). Lippmann’s take on



the relationship between state and citizen is based on a view of the state as a provider in response to citizen needs. In this scenario citizens rely on the state to know and articulate their needs and defer responsibility for maintaining the public sphere to the state. The work of citizens in this scenario is to vote for or against solutions to problems as conceived by “independent, expert organisations” who make “unseen facts intelligible” to those who have to make the decisions (Lippmann, 1922:17). Dewey’s view – by some accounts in response to Lippmann’s – requires a far more ambitious view of the relationship between citizens and the state. It is based on his perception that the state is not to be idealized as an “objectified manifestation of a will and reason” which transcends the “desires and purposes of individuals (Dewey, 1927:5)” but rather as an extension of “modifiable and altering human habits (Dewey, 1927:6)”. The starting point, says Dewey, for interrogating the nature of the relationship between state and citizens, should not be the ideas that shape political theory but the ideas that emanate from the “facts of human activity (1927:9)”. “For ideas belong to human beings who have bodies, and there is no separation between the structures and processes of the part of the body that entertains the ideas and the part that performs acts (Dewey, 1927:8).” The journey in search of “the marks and signs which characterize political behaviour”, says Dewey, will take us to a point where we consider “what the state *ought* to be or what it *is* (1927:9)”. It is important to understand Dewey’s distinction between private and public in order to understand the political work of citizens and journalists and proposed in this study. For Dewey “the public” was never an amorphous group subjected to “collective impersonal will” (1927:19). The public “came into existence” because of the need to protect common interests (Dewey, 1927:17) that affect the private lives of individuals. The public is also not static. Public or civic work changes as public interests change. It is the work of citizens to bring these interests to the fore and to organize itself in ways that would make these interests clear to the state. The work of citizens is to “scrutinize, “investigate” and “search for” the best state to guard their interests (Dewey, 1927:31-33).

The perspectives of Dewey and Lippmann on the capacity and work of citizens emerged at a time of important cultural flux. Industrialisation and urbanisation changed not only where and how people lived but also the possibilities and potential of engaging with fellow citizens. First World War I, World War II and other civil conflicts in Europe and elsewhere affected people’s lives and created an environment where people felt they had little control over decisions made by governments on their behalf but decisions that affected their way of live profoundly. At the same time developments in media and communication expanded the scope of information available to citizens. Citizens relied on this information to help them make sense of a world

outside the borders of their immediate community – a distant and unfamiliar world which became closer and more familiar based on the information they received in the media. But the nature of presenting information was also changing.

While the potential of manipulating information to certain effect has always been intuitive to human nature, in the time of Dewey and Lippmann manipulating information and the force of propaganda became scientific endeavours. Communication research focused on the effects of information on people. This resulted in the world of information officially turning into a sphere of experts – expert researchers providing expert spin doctors with evidence on how to create barriers “between the public and the event (Lippmann, 1922:23)”. Information could now be distinguished between what was published “in the interest of the public” and what was not published because “it was none of the public’s business (Lippmann, 1922:23)”. Powerful governments manipulated information to serve powerful agendas. Citizens felt left out. The national public sphere and the local public sphere became two separate spaces. Politics was what happened in the national sphere practised by experts. In the local sphere citizens came together to address local problems; this was community service or volunteerism and practised by people who cared what happened to their local school or local environment or in their churches and in their hospitals. Citizens did what they have to do and politicians did what they did. Every four or five years, politicians will provide citizens with information on how they plan to change education, health and social services with a view to get their vote. These plans may or may not relate to the problems citizens experience on a local level and citizens may or may not be persuaded to go to the polls. While information as conceived in the earlier notions of democratic theory still had an important role, the way this was understood by citizens and the way this was understood by government and the way this was understood by the media itself would never be the same again.

#### **4. The role of information in the original conception of democracy**

*“But even as we speak, language speaks us.” (Hartley, 1982:2)*

The relationship between power, information flow, systems of government and people is well documented. McQuail (2005:24) and Curran (1982:202) go back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century when the papacy asserted its authority through its “dominance over institutional processes of ideological production that created and maintained support for its exercise of power (Curran, 1982:204)”. This “ideological production” ranged from “signifying forms” (buildings, pictures, statues, coins,

banners, stained glass, songs, medallions and rituals) (Curran, 1982:202) to combining evangelism with reporting “the news” to copying texts supporting papal ideology at the expense of texts challenging the “ecclesiastical view” of the world (Curran, 1982:208). McQuail (2005:24) suggests evidence of “elaborate and effective means” of communicating to “everyone without exception” through the Middle Ages. The communication was not just about ideas but also obligations and rules related to politics and religion. The printing press brought with it the potential of production and distribution of information independent of the church and opened up new possibilities of engagement not only between structures of power – like the church – and its subjects but also between the subjects themselves. It was no longer possible for the church alone to dictate the terms of the flow of information. It opened up the space for “disseminating new and deviant ideas” and with its role in the “propaganda struggles” of the Reformation the technology of the printed word “acquired a particular social and cultural definition (McQuail, 2005:24)”.

Under autocratic rule decisions were made in secret, outside of the public realm and based on arbitrary choices of a monarch who did not have to account to citizens. The monarch or the feudal lord or the authority vested in the church controlled most aspects of the flow of information particularly as it related to the preservation of political power. In this scenario the concept of information in the public interest depended entirely on the whim of the ruler. In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century liberal democratic theory suggested universal participatory power to citizens which implied an inter-dependent relationship between power and communication. The public conversations that happened in the coffee houses, the salons and literary journals were the main carriers of the work of citizens in the practice of representative democracy. The bourgeoisie or the “reading public” was the “real carrier of the public (Habermas, 1989:23)”. The political public sphere evolved from the “public sphere in the world of letters”. While participation in these discussions were limited to those who had money and or were educated, this “vehicle of public opinion” was an important catalyst to put the state in touch with the needs of society (Habermas, 1989:30-31). In Britain the polemic emerging in these forums made the government uncomfortable and proclamations censured the “seedbeds of political unrest” because they “defamed” the state and spoke “evil of things they understand not (Habermas, 1989:59)”. Habermas regards the lifting of censorship through the Licensing Act of 1695 as a turning point in consolidating participation in politics “even into the disenfranchised segment of the population” signalling a new phase of development for the public sphere (1989:58-59). “Rational-critical arguments” could now be published in the press. The press provided citizens

with information that assisted them in making political decisions and discuss these “before the new forum of the public (Habermas, 1989:58)”.

The nature of engagement between citizens and between citizens and government in this public space and the central role of the media in this process became a cornerstone in classic liberal theory (McNair, 2000:18). Liberal democratic theory implied the imperative of the free flow of information for citizens to make the rational choices as required by a system in which “elected political leaders had the right to demand respect and loyalty even from those who had not voted for them” and “citizens had the right to dissent from the prevailing political wisdom ... (McNair, 2000:17)”. A “new social space or field between the state and civil society” (Dahlgren, 1991:3) was created. Since the 18<sup>th</sup> century the media has become “the main source and focus of a society’s shared experience (McNair, 2000:20)”. Information became a crucial component of the practices and institutions to consolidate a vision of citizens electing representatives as guardians of the “common good” and holding them responsible for the task through access to information. In the 1930s Habermas described this space between “between civil society and the state, in which critical public discussion of general interest was institutionally guaranteed (Habermas, 1989:xi) as the “liberal” public sphere. More than just being a space for critical public discussion it became the space where state authority was publicly monitored “through informed and critical discourse by the people (Habermas, 1989:xi)”. By the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century increased circulation provided newspapers with the necessary political leverage and status as the “fourth estate (Curran, 1982:210)”. The media was now a non-negotiable institution of democratic practice. The fact that economic power was one of the deciding factors in consolidating the progress and credibility of the press lead Habermas to remark that the “traffic in news” and the “traffic in commodities” were now on the same trajectory (1989:16).

The power of the printed word is inherent in the way that it dictated “the origins of national consciousness (Andersen, 1983:37)”. It is also intrinsic in the way that control of the printed word was in the hands of the literate, the educated and / or those with economic means. In medieval times the importance of the printed word was not so much its use for communication with others but that it was a means of storing “repository of wisdom” and that it documented “works of science and practical information (McQuail, 2005:26)”. By the time that printing presses began to produce newspapers as a source of income in 18<sup>th</sup> century North-America, the printer-journalist teamed up with the local post office in an effort to distribute information as widely as possible and so a powerful communication-distribution nexus became the “key to North American communications and community intellectual life (Andersen, 1983:61)”. The

foundations for newspaper production as an undertaking of experts were put in place. While, on paper, liberal democracy envisaged newspapers – and later on the more encompassing mass media – as crucial to enable citizens to participate in democratic process as part of “an informed, rational electorate (McNair, 2000:17)” the political economy of media continues to shape the scope and the content of information to citizens.

## **5. Changing notions of citizenship in democratic theory and practice in the 20<sup>th</sup> century**

Part of the problem explored in this study is the disregard in contemporary forms of democratic governance for a qualitative distinction between electoral politics and “vernacular, work-centred traditions of citizenship (Boyte, 2004:xvii)” or public work. While active citizenship has been part of the historic conception of democracy – as shown earlier in this chapter – we are still grappling with what that means in practice. If the “distrust of democracy is ... as old as political thought itself (Barber, 1984:94)”, how do we give practical meaning to the Aristotelian or “ancient” conception of democracy as a system in which members regard each other as equals, the collective voice of the members is sovereign and all the capacity, resources and institutions needed for self-government is inherent (Dahl, 1989:1)? Dahl proposes that while universally popular, democracy has become a “vague endorsement of a popular idea”. He divides critics of democracy into three categories: those who are opposed to the idea because they believe that while it may be possible it is undesirable; those who believe that it is desirable but inherently impossible and those who are sympathetic to the idea and wish to maintain it but are critical of it (1989:2).

Sandel (2010:12) goes beyond mere criticism to suggest that liberal-democracy has “lost its capacity to inspire” because it is unable to generate “civic idealism” or address citizens’ sense of disempowerment. Sandel argues that the way in which the liberal democratic model engages with business and other special interests is the dividing line for its interface with citizens. The economic model driving the rights based approaches of the post-war America liberalism of Franklin Roosevelt had the interests of citizens at its heart. Now, citizen interests – at the root of the original conception of liberal democracy – are held captive by powerful economic interests that force leaders to make choices which “deprive ordinary citizens of a meaningful voice in political affairs (Sandel, 2010:10)”.

Grappling with the realisation of a “meaningful voice” for citizens, democratic theorists started re-evaluating the meaning of civil society in the 1970s and 1980s (Boyte, 2010).

Deliberative democracy and participatory democracy were two main proponents of this theoretical and practical discussion. In part, the theoretical discussion was underpinned by the issue of scale. What constitutes the space for civil society and what is the space occupied by the state? From Aristotle to Locke to Mills to Marx and into the age of industrialisation and urbanisation, how the “demos is to arrive at its decisions” was at the heart of an “ideal standard” for democratic process (Dahl, 1989:108). How many of the voices of the demos could realistically be taken into account in the democratic process? Lippmann argued that the idea of the “omnicompetent citizen” is only valid in “the rural township” (1922:148) where everyone is familiar with the environment and “men were talking about substantially the same things” (1922:149). Dewey argued that the tendency to involve just some citizens – experts – and excluding most citizens from identifying and solving public problems like health and education prevents “a public” from “recognizing and articulating itself (1927:123)”. The issue of scale is also part of Sandel’s argument around civic idealism mentioned in the previous paragraph. Progressive liberals in the United States, bolstered by the impact of the voices of ordinary citizens to change policy on “the great liberal causes” like civil rights, rights to health and education, women’s and racial equality support for the poor from the 1950s to the 1970s, proposed that the answer to ideal democracy was social welfare liberalism, which, while it may lead to “big government”, will also protect the interest of vulnerable groups. Conservative liberals of the 1980s, most notably Ronald Reagan, suggested that welfare liberalism undermined individual freedom and proposed a lesser role for government and free markets to guarantee individual freedom (Sandel, 2010:11).

As the debate about big versus small government continued between politicians on the left and the right Americans felt more and more disempowered to participate in political process (Sandel, 2010:12). In this context theorists searched for ways to give meaning and content to notions of public sphere and rational political discussion. This search for meaning will be covered in more detail in a meta-analysis of the theoretical polemic in the next chapter.

## **6. Changing notions of media theory and practice in the 20<sup>th</sup> century**

### **6.1 Who or what is the audience?**

I, like my father and my grandfather before him, never miss an opportunity to listen to a “news bulletin”. Born in the first half of the 1900s, my grandfather was an audience member of the “wireless” and then the “transistor radio”. Tuning the dial to familiar frequencies kept him in

touch with events outside of his immediate world. Television did not exist and newspapers were not readily available. When my grandfather became part of my consciousness, the rhythm of news and weather at 7 o'clock in the morning, 1 o'clock in the afternoon, 7 o'clock in the evening and just before bedtime at 9 o'clock at night was an established pattern of every day. Everyone was welcome to participate – and did most of the time – but everyone also knew this ritual was not to be interrupted. It was, for the most part, the only media option available to keep him informed and relaxed and to provide companionship and diversion – different functions/uses of the media for audience members described by (McQuail, 2005:423). Living in the time of the “unitary model (McQuail, 2005:448)” he shared his media ritual with most other people in his social context and being part of this collective audience enabled him to “bridge the gap between the private, domestic world and the concerns and activities of the wider society (McQuail, 2005:432)”. The distinction between sender and receiver, which according to McQuail (2005:446), is one of the determinants of audience survival, was clear and “interactive and consultative uses (McQuail, 2005:447)” of the media was non-existent.

My father's habit of engagement with news media followed a similar pattern to the one described for my grandfather. Television was added to his media menu. This required a more sophisticated audience response and having more media to choose from meant a shift in the “motives for attending to mass media and the satisfactions expected or derived (McQuail, 2005:420)”. While the distinction between sender and receiver was still relatively clear and options for interaction and consultation between audience and media still limited, my father was already part of the process of audience segmentation described by Gandy (2000:2) as “the complex process through which the great variety that sets us apart as individuals is cast off, or ignored in order to emphasize the similarities that help to shape and define us as members of groups”.

I get my “news bulletin” from the rich variety of media on offer to the fragmented and segmented audience of this century. I watch, read or listen to local, national or international news on my television screen, my laptop, my mobile phone or the radio. I sign in to Facebook for “news” about my personally segmented “community” who can include members from around the globe. I select news of special interest to suit my own preferences. I sign up for “news alerts” to stay in touch in between the bulletins. I belong to list serves to keep me informed. I participate confidently on any number of blogs. I am part of an audience community with agency that allows me to participate in news making and news sharing. I am both spectator of and participant in news. I may be part of any number of “new and different audiences ... based on “shared

interest or identity (McQuail, 2005:446)". My media world offer "a little something for everyone (and) channels tend to specialize in a particular type of content (Webster, 2005:367)".

These three personal scenarios represent and illustrate the evolving character of the media and the media audience in what McQuail calls the "commonsense usage" of the word (2005:396). As media users – readers, viewers, listeners – my grandfather, my father and myself, would recognize and accept the word audience as an "unambiguous description" of ourselves – a description, says McQuail, which practitioners and theorists, will also comply with. But as audience members my grandfather, my father and I have also been the objects of and subjected to a world "beyond the commonsense usage" – the realm of "theoretical formulations". In this context audience has become a concept that presents different meanings and contention. It is in this sphere of the theoretical where researchers, in observing the interaction between the audience and media, have come to describe the audience as "fragmented", "segmented" (McQuail, 2005:447) and as disappearing in "indirect ways (McQuail, 1997:2)". This correlates with the experience of many citizens in relations to the state.

McQuail (2005:446-447) proposes that fragmentation and segmentation result from new technologies that are blurring the line between sender and receiver – a line he considers as "crucial to the original idea of the media audience". He suggests further that "interactive and consultative uses of media" take away the spectator value of audience, an intrinsic characteristic of "the original mass audience". In losing these "original" characteristics audiences re-group around "tastes and lifestyles" rather than "geographical area or social class".

Audiences become smaller and smaller and more and more homogenous but instead of having an identity as a "social collective" who share and understand common cultural interests, audiences are now characterized by "consumer collectives" who share interests in commodities and "have no more in common with each other than owners of any other consumer article (McQuail, 2005:447)". In this sense the "end of the audience" is the erosion of the relationship between media and citizens as a collective with an interest in civil life and public affairs. McQuail refers to other researchers who have noted the "breakdown of the *referent*" for audience in research done in the humanities and social sciences (Biocca in McQuail, 2005:396). James Carey raises concern over the future of the audience in this public context:

*"But for all the ritual incantation of the public in the rhetoric of journalism, no one quite knows any longer what the public is, or where one might find it, or even whether it exists*



*any longer. For all the conceptual importance of the public, it is a symbol without a referent (1987:5)”*

Katz (1996:24) also links the issue of audience segmentation to the broader debate around democratic practice: “...from the point of participatory democracy, television is dead, almost everywhere.” He calls the newspaper and the radio the first media of “national integration followed by television (Katz, 1996:33)”.

There are two departure points for exploring the meaning and implications of audience theory. The one is from the perspective of the audience as consumers at the mercy of the forces of media markets and advertisers (Jhally, 2007) and another perspective is the audience as citizens; “a group that gathers to discuss the news (Carey, 1987:10)” and integral to the public sphere. The last departure point is relevant for the purpose of this study.

## **6.2 The reflection in the mirror**

Mediation is another relevant theoretical perspective for this study. In the same way that democratic theory struggles with the inherent contradictions of democratic practice, journalists struggle with inherent contradictions of practicing journalism and fulfilling the theoretical promise of their role as “mirrors” in democratic society. In describing a frame of reference for connecting media with society McQuail (2005:84-85) describes a process based on Westley and MacLean’s revised 1957- transmission model of communication (in McQuail, 2005:84). This model proposes that the media “provide their audience with a supply of information, images, stories and impressions, sometimes according to anticipated needs, sometimes guided by their own purposes ... and sometimes following the motives of other social institutions ...” This transmission model combined with a number of normative themes provides a theoretical rationale for how reporters source and how media users receive information.

From the perspective of normative theory, how the media ought to operate in a democracy takes on a dimension of what McQuail later calls “normative obligation” or “normative expectation (2005:162)”. In both their relationship with media users and the political powers there are strong signals of “what they ought to do”. This study proposes that in democratic process the media has the potential to enrich democratic process by expanding both the current understanding of obligation and expectation. The current understanding of obligation as being watchdogs or guardians of democratic values such as transparency and accountability limits the mediation function of the media to exposing misuse of power or uncovering

information on behalf of citizens that may be useful to citizens as they come to understand their role in democratic practice. While this is an undeniable democratic function of the media, this model of mediation, if practised in terms of an expert-driven model, continues to be disempowering despite the best intentions in that, instead of “providing sites where citizens can engage in the political process (Jacobs, 2002:9-10)”, it limits the potential for participation in self-determining decision making.

This study argues that the media navigates the “field of social forces (McQuail, 2005:280)” on terms understood by journalists as them in control and dictating the range of issues and the sequence of progression even when and where it starts with events and voices in society as proposed in Westley and MacLean’s revised transmission model (McQuail, 2005:84). Reporters do not reflect critically on the effects of them presenting events as their own versions of events – as *an* account – and the power they have to choose to report on a specific event out of a range of possible events and to channel or give access to the “views and choices of those ... who want to reach a wider public (McQuail, 2005:69)”.

In the current configuration of “professional cultures” and “occupational context” of media production McQuail (2005:276) the tension or clash between profit and “social purpose” means that routines and practices have come to affect the media’s ability to “select criteria for selection and presentation and provide its audience with “a valid reflection of reality (McQuail, 2005:319-320)” which includes the way citizens define problems in their own contexts and the range of action available to citizens who want to be part of solving public problems. These criteria determine the media’s ability to gain and sustain public trust. To gain public trust the media has to strike a balance between the demands from and the “struggle over access (McQuail, 2005:308)” by the “social forces” and the way the media defines its goals and relevance in society.

### **6.3 The power of naming and framing**

The skill of naming and framing issues of public concern is central to the practice of deliberative democracy. In this context the role of the media in social construction through framing and schemata becomes relevant (McQuail, 2005:101). The media’s ability to affect politics is embedded in their potential to frame the news one way or another (Entman, 2004). McQuail (2005:378) alludes to a potential confusion in pinning down the exact meaning of framing in the theoretical sense stating that in relation to news the term has been “widely and loosely” used,

often to replace “terms such as ‘frame of reference’, ‘context’, ‘theme’, or even news angle”. This statement by McQuail is a useful departure point since it makes clear what framing is *not*. If framing is to be used to study media effects, McQuail argues, the term should be used with “some precision (2005:378)”.

At least two authors describe the problems of defining the concept with “precision”. Scheufele (1999:103) refers to “vague conceptualization” and “terminological and conceptual inconsistencies” leading to the undifferentiated use of other structuring devices like agenda setting and priming. Entman (2004:5) talks about framing as an “imprecise catchall that means slightly different things to each researcher” and the need for a “clearer conceptual grasp of framing”. Both Scheufele and Entman suggest framing models to make it easier for researchers to explain the place of framing “as a theory of media effects (Scheufele, 1999:114)”. Scheufele suggests a “process model of framing” which explains framing as a continuous process of inputs and outcomes in which both journalists and audiences play a role in building and setting frames (1999:115). “Cascading activation” is Entman’s (2004:9) answer to the conceptualisation dilemma. Informed by political communication theory this model differs from Scheufele’s model in that it specifically explores the role of power in the framing process. Entman argues for a hierarchical or stratified analysis where framing starts at the political top and “cascades” through “other elites” and the media before the “framing words” and “framing images” reaches the public (Entman, 2004:10).

Rosen (1997a:12) offers yet another approach to framing. He proposes that “ritual” and “values” drive the framing process. According to Rosen (1997a:12):

*“Facts can’t tell you how they want to be framed. Journalists decide how facts will be framed, and that means making decisions about which values will structure the story.”*

Rosen states the idea of getting “both sides” of a story as an example of a ritual: “The very idea of getting ‘both sides’, of there being two sides to every story (rather than three or four) is itself a powerful framing ritual (Rosen, 1997a:13)”.

Allan (2004:58) and McQuail (2005:378) focus on the “organizing” effect of framing and the implications for objectivity. Allan further emphasises the ideological implications of framing as an organising tool as it imposes “order on the multiple happenings of the social world so as to render them into a series of meaningful events (2004:58)”. Instead of “inclusion” and “exclusion (Allan, 2004:58)” as defining components of framing, Entman (2004:5) sees “selecting” and “highlighting” and offers the following definition:

*“...selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and or solution.”*

## Chapter 4: A meta-analysis of the literature

*“Phrases such as ‘the recovery of the public sphere,’ used rather often these days, do not necessarily imply that there was once, long ago, in some pristine past, an era in which the public reigned, in which our ancestors lived a free, uncoerced life of communal bliss and that we, now armed with spiritual travellers checks, can haul back to the present and re-establish (J. W. Carey, 1997a:228)”.*

### 1. Introduction

What kind of relationship does democracy require of citizens and the media? This question stimulated this inquiry. Further reading sparked more questions about this relationship. What should the “communication concerning the affairs of the “commonwealth” look like for the “public of ‘human beings’ engaged in rational-critical debate” to become “citizens” (Habermas, 1989:106-107)? And what role do journalists play to facilitate this communication and “organizational principle” of the “bourgeois constitutional state (Habermas, 1989:119)”. These were the questions informing the hypothesis of this study:

*A shift in the way journalists consider their professional role could lead to a re-assessment of the political work of journalists and the political work of citizens and build new habits of participation, discussion and action in representative democratic process.*

This hypothesis emerged from an exploration of scholarly work about the potential of alternative frameworks to deepen the engagement between the state, citizens and the media in order to arrive at democratic practice which realises the “old idea” of people being “the authors of their own government and laws (McAfee, 2000:96)”:

*Deliberative democracy* takes into account the original promise of representative or democratic governance as a system which would transform governance “from the idea and practice of rule by the few to the idea and practice of rule by the many” (Dahl, 1989:1). This framework within political and democratic theory proposes that citizens will be more connected to government if they have opportunities for structured and systematic discussion on issues of common concern. Deliberation in this context is different from “other ways of talking” in that it provides citizens with opportunities to listen to different viewpoints, weigh different options for

solutions to public problems and expect that there are trade-offs in choices when it comes to public decision making (Mathews, 1999:222-223).

*Public Journalism* provides an entry point for the media to re-connect with citizens in a different way by framing stories with a civic lens as opposed to the lens of politicians or other powerful interest groups. The effect of expert-driven journalism has been covered in chapter one of this study. Public journalism is not about technique; it is about a new approach to “basic tools of listening, interviewing, gathering facts, framing stories, weaving narratives (Rosen, 1999:168)”. It also provides a framework to “fight the forces of apathy and disengagement that seemed to be driving people away from public life” (Campbell quoted by Rosen, 1999:178) and “relocating” the public in the “imagination” of journalists (Rosen, 1999:178).

*Democratic Professionalism* provides a framework for an alternative approach to the civic work of professionals and also journalists. This framework recognizes the “democratic significance” (Dzur, 2008:3) of professions like journalism and proposes that professionals engage with citizens as being “part of civil society” and serving “functional social purpose (Dzur, 2008:46)”.

## **2. Demarcating the literature**

In the previous chapter, three themes, each with its own set of sub-themes were identified to shape the argument about the interrelatedness between the state, citizens and the media systematically. These themes pointed the way to some key concepts to ground the study.

- To lay a basis for the argument about alternatives to the current configuration of the media, citizens and the state the research starts with literature which brings together themes around the conception and evolution of representative government or democracy. Deriving from this literature, this chapter explores and analyses in more detail the concepts of democracy, the political public sphere and rational critical debate.
- The second theme in the literature review explored the conception and evolution of citizenship in the context of liberal democracy. Key concepts from the literature review which will be the subject of this meta-analysis are citizen agency, public work and professionalism.

- Thirdly, the previous chapter explored the evolution of the role of communication, later the press and now mass communication in representative and democratic process. The literature review focused on changing notions of audience, mediation and the power of framing the news. This chapter will provide a deeper analysis of how the literature links the role of the media to democratic process, public opinion, citizenship and the implications for professional routines and practices.

Perceptions of power (and expertise), authority (and expertise) and identity cut across all three themes to explain the obstacles that stand in the way of a more citizen-centred approach to democratic practice.

The logic of Habermas's conception of the "political public sphere" is a useful starting point for the meta-analysis of these concepts. The conceptual approach proposed in *Public Journalism* resonates with Habermas's description of the press supporting opposition politics in 18<sup>th</sup> century Britain as "a genuinely critical organ of a public engaged in critical political debate (1989:60)". When Habermas describes public debate as a potential force to change the will ("voluntas") of people into a rationale ("ratio") that evolves when the "public competition of private arguments came into being as the consensus about what was practically necessary in the interest of all (1989:83)" he describes the elements of Deliberative Democracy. Habermas describes to some extent the problematic nature of the expert-oriented identity of journalists when he describes the art critics of 18<sup>th</sup> century Germany as "experts combating 'dogma' and 'fashion'" and who "appealed to the ill-informed person's naïve capacity for judgment (1989:41)". The theme that weaves these three frameworks together seems deceptively simple: What can be done to transform liberal democracy as we have come to know it into a "unique process of collective decision-making (Dahl, 1989:5)"? As such, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* offers a launch pad for examining most of the relevant key concepts as mentioned earlier. Habermas borrows materials and methods from sociology, economics, law, political science and social and cultural history to get a holistic perspective as he interrogates "bourgeois society" – its "preconditions, structures, functions, and inner tensions (Habermas, 1989:xi)". Habermas describes the factors leading to the evolution of the sphere "between civil society and the state, in which critical public discussion of matters of general interest was institutionally guaranteed (Habermas, 1989:xi)". Habermas's view is not just informed by empirical or theoretical features of political theory. As a proponent of the second generation of Frankfurt School theorists Habermas continued the tradition of the School in its call for scientists

to take an inter-disciplinary perspective on society (Finlayson, 2005:1-2). This multi-disciplinary approach and analysis is particularly constructive for the purpose of this study as it considers the complexities related to power, authority and identity from a pluralist perspective.

The next section analyses key concepts, organized around the themes as set out earlier, to consider the complexity, challenges and contestation emanating from work in the public sphere.

### **3. The political public sphere, politics and rational critical debate**

The public sphere, says McAfee (2000:83), is not so much a place but rather “an occurrence” which offers “otherwise ‘private individuals’” – “any time two or more individuals come together” – an opportunity to “discuss matters of politics”. But “politics” is something that most people feel cynical about. Not so much because they are not interested or apathetic, as conventional wisdom would have it, but rather because they feel that the “political system ... has pushed them out of their rightful place in governing the nation (Mathews, 1999:11)”. When people think about politics they think about “competition, struggle, fighting, war (McAfee, 2000)”. This tension around power and authority is captured in the structural transformation of the public sphere which Habermas describes. The functioning of the public sphere that Habermas interrogates and the functioning of the public sphere today remains a “concrete manifestation” of the democratic character of societies and “the most immediately visible indicators” of “imperfections (Dahlgren, 1991:2)”. Habermas identifies how the meaning of the public, while intended to include “all subjects”, was limited to “a new stratum of ‘bourgeois’ people” occupying “a central position within the ‘public’ (Habermas, 1989:23)”. Access and authority to participate was only part of the tension. The very intention of rational critical debate in the 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> century public sphere of the “political realm” as opposed to the public sphere of the “world of letters (Habermas, 1989:51)” was not agreement but disagreement and opposition. Supported by the “principle of publicity”, “bourgeois polemics” joined the polemics of the aristocracy in protesting efforts to legitimise secret practices of Machiavelli’s rule and other “absolutist” tendencies (Habermas, 1989:52-53)”. “Publicity” carried the “critical public debate among private people” into the public sphere and finally manifested in Hobbes’s theory of the state: “*veritas non auctoritas facit legem* (truth not authority makes law) (Habermas, 1989:53)”.

The transformed public sphere of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, “subject to all the pressures of modern publicity (Rosen, 1999:63)” is at least as a contested space as the early public sphere Habermas



describes. The difference is that the liberal democratic promise of universal suffrage, which was merely budding in the public sphere of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, has now blossomed. Liberal democratic theory promises all people the right to participate in government but in practice this right has been relegated to voting and a public sphere populated by the “political machinery of a competitive society in which some speakers had vastly more powers than others (Rosen, 1999:63)”. While still a “powerful ideal”, it has become an “awkward description of the contemporary scene (Rosen, 1999:63). Liberal democracy has now turned politics into “an activity of specialists and experts” operating in an “instrumentalist setting” where citizen representation remains “an abstraction (Barber, 2000:448-449)”. Barber describes liberal democracy as “thin democracy” with values that are “means to exclusively, individualistic and private ends (1984:4)”. He argues against “the politics of elites and masses that masquerades as democracy in the West (1984:117)” and for a definition of politics that include the work done “where women and men gather in small groups to adjudicate differences or plan common tasks (Barber, 1984:xxvii)”. He favours a deliberative version of democracy, describing its virtue:

*“Yet talk remains central to politics, which would ossify completely without its creativity, its variety, its openness and flexibility, its inventiveness, its capacity for discovery, its subtlety and complexity, its eloquence, its potential for empathy and affective expression, and its deeply paradoxical (some would say dialectical) character that displays man’s full nature as a purposive, interdependent, and active being (Barber, 1984:174).*

#### **4. Civil society, citizen agency, public work and professionalism**

The liberal model of the early public sphere was based on classic relationship between *bourgeois-homme-citoyen* (Habermas, 1989:116). “Civil society as the natural order converting private vices into public virtues (Habermas, 1989:116 -117).” According to Habermas, Hegel understood the “anarchic and antagonistic” nature of civil society. This debunked the “liberal pretences” of public opinion as “plain reason (Habermas, 1989:118)”. In tracing the genesis of liberal democracy and the evolution of the public sphere Habermas proposes that Hegel, unlike Kant or earlier Rousseau, did not see the public sphere as a “principle of enlightenment” or where “reason” is realized. Hegel, in Habermas’s view, regarded it as a space that “served only to integrate subjective opinions into the objectivity assumed by the spirit in the form of the state (Habermas, 1989:120)”. Hegel insisted on a distinction between politics and morality: “The

ethical substance, the state, has its determinate being, i.e., its right, directly embodied in something existent, something not abstract but concrete, and the principle of its conduct and behaviour can only be this concrete existent and not one of the many universal thoughts supposed to be moral commands (Hegel's Philosophy of Right, sec 337, p215 in Habermas, 1989:122).

As a basis for further analysis of what constitutes a public and the meaning of citizenship this study looks to John Dewey and Walter Lippmann. Both Dewey and Lippmann were contemporaries of Habermas but theirs is a less theoretical and more normative view of the function of citizenry and information in democratic process and practice. Neither Dewey nor Lippmann refers to Habermas in their own seminal works, *The Public and its Problems* and *Public Opinion* respectively but Habermas resonates in both in the exploration of power and authority as these manifest in the political function of citizens, notions of public and private and public opinion and publicity. Dewey and Lippmann are particularly relevant for the purpose of this study with their (opposing) perspectives on the role of experts in democracy. Citizens, says Lippmann, need experts to provide them with “maps of the world (1922:9)”.

Hegel’s “anarchic and antagonistic” civil society revived in the 1970s and 1980s with the fall of the Berlin Wall, new concepts of civic association in Eastern Europe and the break-up of the Soviet Union. Coinciding with the translation into English of Habermas’s *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* in 1989, this sparked a return to “investigations into the nature of civil society (McAfee, 2000:82-83)”. At the time, says Boyte (2010), civil society “formed a liberated zone from which to mount challenges to authoritarian governments”. The question is, what spurred that agency which inspired citizens to actively challenge “the monster state (Hagopian, F. in Boyte, 2010)” and what could sustain it?

The incentive to participate in the public sphere is not a matter of vested interest. Confidence to participate is built by a sense of acknowledgement that participation makes a difference. Mathews (1999:11-27) suggests a number of reasons why citizens feel “forced out of politics”. Drawing on results of research of the Harwood study on Citizens and Politics, Mathews shows how a sense of “powerless and exclusion” rather than apathy accounts for non-participation in civic life. Another disincentive, according to Cortés (2006:46-47), is political correctness, which stops people from having “real conversations” with people who have different viewpoints from our own. This undermines the development of capacity of people to consider the validity of experiences other than their own or indeed, to “develop a larger vision of the

neighbourhood, their state, or their society ( Cortés, 2006:47)”. Elsewhere, Cortés (1996:31) positions the discussion about declining civic agency in the broader context of “social and economic decay”. The problem, says Cortés, is that “well-intentioned” efforts by citizens to address these overwhelming problems happen in isolation and in a “piecemeal” fashion and without the support of the political system. The lack of impact of *their own efforts* to address social problems leads to citizens feeling politically incompetent and it contributes to “lack of political imagination (Cortés, 1996:31)”. The lack of impact *citizens see from government efforts* to address these problems convinces citizens that “politics is largely irrelevant to their lives (Cortés, 1996:31)”. Carey (1997a:229) argues that politics (and the press) “seem meaningless” to citizens because they have been “severed from any imagination of a possible politics that can serve as a basis of action and motivation”.

While Cortés suggests that civic agency should be cultivated inside institutions (2006:47), Boyte (2010) argues that agency is built through public work which “puts the citizen at the centre of public creation”. He defines public work as a “sustained efforts by a mix of people who make the commons, or things of lasting civic value”. Boyte challenges the way in which Habermas envisages civil society as the “site for citizens who in their civic identities are separated from the work of those in government, the economy, or the professions (Boyte, 2010)”. He argues that this “dynamic” makes citizens “discussants *about* (author’s italics) the common world rather than active makers *of* (author’s italics) it”. This view of civil society creates the impression that politics belong to the state and makes citizens “consumers of the commonwealth, not its creators (Boyte, 2010)”.

Deliberative democracy was one of the theoretical models emerging in the late 1970s suggesting “ideals of rational legislation, participatory politics, and self-governance (Bohman & Rehg, 1997:ix)”. Gutman and Thompson (2004:3) add “reason-giving” as a feature of deliberative practice. The “moral basis” for deliberation, say the authors, is to be found in the concept of democracy which recognises that “persons should be treated not merely as objects of legislation, as passive subjects to be ruled, but as autonomous agents who take part in the governance of their own society, directly or through their representatives (Gutman & Thompson, 2004:3). Boyte (2004) and Barber (1984) argue that active citizenship is a vital component of “strong democracy”. Boyte proposes a “a fuller account of public life and politics” in his argument for a version of citizenship which “expresses and develops the public dimensions of work and the productive dimensions of politics (2004:71)”. Boyte argues that in order for

citizens to become “co-creators of democracy” – that is, “a way of life built through the public work of citizens”, it is important to equate citizenship with “productive activity”. That implies more than the space for critical rational debate as envisaged by Habermas and subsequent deliberation theorists. “Deliberation is worthwhile, but the deliberative citizen is too narrow a conception of civic agency to make much change (Boyte, 2010).” The problem with deliberation theory is that it continues to “draw on the map of civic space” as defined by Habermas, and this “severs the crucial connection between citizenship and work (Boyte, 2010)”. Dzur (2008:15) complies with Boyte’s arguments when he suggests that deliberative democracy has no basis in “definitive” theory and that it has the potential to keep “citizens in the role of spectators rather than actors (2008:33)”. Dzur’s contention is more with the regulated and structured nature of deliberative practice. Here Dzur has a different reading of Habermas than Boyte and argues that deliberation has more potential if conceived of, after Habermas, in a “more porous and less organized way (2008:33)”. Both Dzur’s theory of democratic professionalism and Boyte’s civil society theory draw on deliberative democratic theory and practice to re-conceptualise citizenship as public work (Boyte, 2004:57) and professionals as citizens at work (Dzur, 2008:41). Bingham, Nabatchi, & O’Leary (2005:547) groups deliberative democracy under “quasi-legislative processes” of a “new governance” model which includes citizens more directly in the work of government. They argue for “the citizenry” as the “tool makers and the tool users” of government to be added to this governance model alongside “horizontal networks of public, private, and nonprofit (sic) organisations (Bingham, et al., 2005:547)”. Deliberation may not be enough.

Lippmann (1922:203) proposes that “some form of expertness” is necessary to help citizens unravel “the vast environment in which he is entangled.” While Lippmann’s proposal originates from concern “that leaving matters to the public was ill advised (McAfee, 2008:9)” democratic professionalism originates from the idea that the power and authority inherent in professions are relevant to “democratic citizenship (Dzur, 2008:9)”. As such the idea of democratic professionalism provides a compelling entry point to a contemporary notion of professional citizenship as action and public work. Campbell (2007:39) describes professions as “community technologies” in service of “intractable social problems”.

To inform his theory of democratic professionalism Dzur turns to the professional practice, organization and “self-understanding” of the social trustee and radical critique models. While the social trustee model has progressive potential in its concern for the commercialisation of professions and the suggestion of professional responsibility to society it is firmly entrenched

in the positivist ideas of professionals as an expert and specialist class and “laypeople” as clients and consumers (Dzur, 2008:63). Institutions and professions working in the social trustee or guardian model of professionalism, says Campbell (2007:40), are “trained folks trying to guide and direct citizens about what’s best for them”. The alternative, “working with the public” holds more potential to strengthen civic agency in its approach to citizens as “cocreators (sic) of value, actual sovereigns (Campbell, 2007:40)”.

The radical critique model proposed by Dzur holds more promise as an epistemological perspective for the purpose of this thesis with its analysis of professional authority and power as being “technocratic barriers to popular influence on elected officials” and their claim that professions “are actively disabling certain kinds of knowledge and skills (Dzur, 2008:80)”. From the perspective of radical critique however, the social trustee model proposes that the actions, organisational patterns and identity of these professions be regulated by the professional group itself rather than the state. The social trustee model of professionalism is rooted in the concerns of the industrialisation era that the general tendencies of individualism, self-interest and “moral erosion” would spill over in the practice of “the classical trilogy of clergy, law and medicine” leading to “critical social interests in justice, health and education ... being colonized by market forces (Dzur, 2008:47)”. The issue of self-interest also occurs as a concern for proponents of deliberative democracy. Mansfield (2007:62) argues that while deliberative theorists stress the importance of “we” instead of “I” in deliberation, the recognition of self-interest is crucial to “help unveil hegemonic understanding of the common good when those understandings have evolved to mask subtle forms of oppression”. The argument for acknowledging self-interest in this sense is the same countering force as proposed by the social trustee model of professionalism. Notwithstanding the ongoing debate about whether journalism is a bona fide profession (Soloski, 1989:207).

Participatory democracy was another theoretical model which explored the role of civil society in democratic practice. Mutz (2006:16) warns of the tendency to “blend participatory democracy with deliberative democracy in a seamless fashion”. She argues that participatory democracy is best suited in the context of political activism where people are mobilised around shared values and shared goals. Deliberative democracy is more suited to “social environments that include close contact among people of different perspectives” and “may promote a give and take of political ideas, but they are unlikely to foster political fervor”.

While one may argue the qualitative value of the practice and theory of each model, deliberative democracy, participatory democracy and democratic professionalism suggest normative purpose for active citizens in democratic process. The work of citizens in political process is considered as complementary to the work of journalists. The model of deliberative democracy which involves citizens in the hard work of building and sustaining healthy civic life is proposed as a way citizens can re-enter the realm of politics – where they belong as vital partners in political process and systems of self-government.

## **5. The work of journalists in democratic process – power, authority and professional identity**

In their book, *The Elements of Journalism*, Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007:5-6) refer to citizens twice in what they propose to be the ten elements of journalism or the “principles that have helped both journalists and the people in self-governing systems to adjust to the demands of an ever more complex world”. The first reference is in terms of journalists’ relationship to citizens: “Its first loyalty is to citizens.” The second reference is a new addition to the original nine elements that they proposed in the first edition of the same book and it reads: “Citizens, too, have rights and responsibilities when it comes to the news.” These two elements are important indicators of the primary relationship that guides news selection and presentation. It is not about the politicians, it is not about the markets, it is about the people.

When Carey refers to the public as “the god term of journalism (1987:5)”, he does that from a conceptual perspective in which the “media of communication” constitute “democracy as a way of life” and “a medium of communications is defined by the democratic aspirations of politics (1997a:234)”. These democratic aspirations could constitute journalists as organs of ideology, or watchdogs, or “devices for transmitting information”, “tools of interest groups” or tools of dialogue on public issues or facilitators of “conversation among equals” (J. W. Carey, 1997a:234). This implies more than just loyalty to citizens.

The problem with mainstream, commercial media is that the news agenda is driven by the demands of profit, rather than loyalty to citizens. News is about what will sell newspapers and air time rather than about analysis and context or “a way that facilitates public understanding and stimulates citizen deliberation of the problems behind the stories” (Nip, 2008:180). A range of

demands and pressures characterise the “occupational context” (McQuail, 2005:276) of media organisations. The way in which these pressures and demands are ultimately embedded in media products have bearing on its ability to sustain public trust. This study suggests that the media do very little to facilitate a space where citizens can be more than a “passive, consumer public (Derrida, 2003:42)”<sup>5</sup>. McQuail (2005:164) argues that although there are pressures on the media to conduct themselves in the public interest, most media are not established with the primary goal of serving the public interest. When the goal is purely commercial – as most media are – “the media’s view of what is the public interest tends to equate with what interests the public (McQuail, 2005:164)”. In this sense the culture industry of Horkheimer and Adorno’s Frankfurt School is alive and well today, “structuring desire and truncating meaningfulness, promising escape from the drudgery of work” and “simultaneously upholding capitalism (McAfee, 2008:13)”. In this scenario, what are the implications for the assumed relationship between democracy and the press? While journalism can be said to inform democracy and journalists think of themselves as guardians and, sometimes saviours of democracy, can one equate journalism with democracy (Rosen, 1997b:191)?

Chomsky (1991:9) describes one of two conceptions of a democratic society. He poses that an alternative to the “dictionary” definition of democracy – that of a system in which citizens have the means to participate “in a meaningful way in the management of their own affairs and the means of information are open and free” – is a conception of democracy in which citizens are prevented from managing their own affairs and “the means of information must be kept narrowly and rigidly controlled (Chomsky, 1991:9-10)”. Chomsky could be one of the “intellectuals and activists” McAfee refers to as having a “general sense” that the media are “tools for manipulation” by powerful government (McAfee, 2008:8). McAfee suggests that this view, found among the political right (“decrying the liberal media”) and the left (“outraged by the corporate media”), represents “an impoverished view of both democracy and the media”. In challenge to Chomsky’s view (without actually mentioning his name), McAfee warns against thinking about “democratic governance as form of manufacturing public will” and about the media “as a monolithic entity” used for “instrumental ends (2008:8)”. Rather, McAfee argues, democracy is “a way of being in which all who are affected by common matters have a voice in

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<sup>5</sup> This essay is drawn from an interview Olivier Salvatori and Nicolas Weill conducted with Derrida in 1988. The interview first appeared in English in the book, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today’s Europe*, translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael B. Naas. The article was published in the *Kettering Review* with permission from the Indiana University Press.

shaping those matters”. And the media, in “a plurality of forms” can help give people that voice “and allow them to shape their world together (McAfee, 2008:8)”. This view also challenges Lippman’s proposal at the turn of the last century that democracy requires expert researchers providing expert spin doctors with evidence on how to create barriers “between the public and the event (Lippmann, 1922:23)” and information being published “in the interest of the public”. What was not published was “none of the public’s business (Lippmann, 1922:23)”. Lippmann’s fear to be overrun by “the public” at a time when mass-based democracy and the mass media emerged as the “dominant institutions” of yet another transformation of the public sphere (Dahlgren, 1991:1) is almost palpable. He could not conceive of a model in which the “romantic ideals” of citizenship and democracy could survive the “complexity of 20<sup>th</sup> century life (McAfee, 2008:10)”.

In the early years of the previous century the Frankfurt School’s analysis of the media in the public sphere was dominated by an understanding of citizens being confronted by the “culture industry” shaping people’s needs and also, says McAfee (2008:15) “truncating their political lives and expectations”. Instead of maintaining its “oppositional character” (Du Plooy, 1997:15) the mass media, through mass production of, for example music, turned cultural experience into a commodity. Mass communication soothed society to the extent that it “obscured their real interests”, “promoted passivity” and consequently provided an opportunity for the domination of the “ideas, belief systems and interpretive schemes of the ruling class” (Du Plooy, 1997:14). While the positivist tradition approached these changing conditions with a view to improve a scholarly understanding of communication processes in order to “solve the practical problems of using mass communication more effectively” (Windahl and Signitzer in McQuail, 2005:12), researchers in the critical tradition wanted to “expose underlying problems and faults of media practice and relate them in a comprehensive way to social issues, guided by certain values” (McQuail, 2005:12). Public Journalism proposes a particular framework for exploring a value system which could potentially invigorate today’s public sphere by facilitating a process which helps “citizens explore issues and come to some agreement about how to proceed” (Remaley, 2009:27).

The public sphere evolved through industrialisation and urbanisation, the two world wars and the Cold War and emerged in the 1980s and 1990s in a different configuration of government, citizens and media. Now, says Carey (1997a:233), the shape of democracy, public opinion, public discourse and the press “are all up for grabs”. As we’ve seen earlier, civil society theory, deliberative democracy and participatory democracy are grappling with what citizen



participation could look like and evolve further in this incarnation of the public sphere. This also creates space for a new conceptualisation of the relationship between citizens and the media. Dzur (2008:138) provides a clear summary of the connection between deliberation, public journalism and democratic professionalism:

*“Public journalism attempts to put the ideals of deliberative democracy into the practice of journalism by making the promotion of public deliberation part of the journalist’s role”.*

Dzur (2008:135) justifies his exploration of public journalism as one of the reform movements in terms of professional practice because, along with restorative justice and bioethics, public journalism offers a sound theoretical basis.

In the United States, proponents for alternative frameworks to connect or re-connect journalists with citizens mostly refer to the 1988 presidential election as a turning point in the country’s media practice (Rosen, 1999:37), (J. W. Carey, 1997a:231), (Merritt, 1994:22). As the Cold War was winding down there were expectations of a campaign that would give an indication of America’s place in a world where the issue of Russia will no longer be so prominent and the future was uncertain. Like the Dukakis vs. Bush campaign itself, coverage of the campaign turned out to be a low point in United States history. The media took their lead from the candidates and were more interested in the “spectacle” of the elections and less interested in paying attention to the serious problems facing the electorate. The politicians exploited what they knew about the culture and routines in newsrooms and the journalists convinced themselves that, because of their “superior grasp of the electioneering process”, they were covering the campaign “objectively (Rosen, 1999:34-37)”. In the years before public journalism “surfaced as a movement in 1993 (Swift in Rosen, 1999:32)” journalism scholars were considering the effects of adversarial driven journalism on public life. Referring to Dewey’s idea of public action taking on new meaning when it is observed (1927:24), Rosen (1999:19) poses the question about the role of journalists in terms of the public:

*“A public that leads a fragile kind of existence suggests a different task for the press: not just to inform a public that may not emerge, but to improve the chances that it will emerge”.*

Habermas (1989:29) describes the role of literary journals and periodicals in the public sphere of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century France and Germany as the “training ground for critical public reflection” – tools to improve the chances for a public separate from government to emerge. This “literary precursor” of the press prepared ordinary citizens for participation in the public sphere of “political function (Habermas, 1989:29)”. The same spirit is present in the conceptualisation of the practice and theory of the public journalism model: preparing ordinary citizens for participation in politics beyond the election cycle (Rosen, 1999:51). If deliberative democracy requires from citizens a “reconsideration of what politics is, of who ‘owns’ it and who is responsible for it (Mathews, 1999:5)” public journalism requires from journalists a reconsideration of their understanding of the “intricate relations between power and authority in journalism (Rosen, 1999:53)” and their power to determine who counts as political players (Rosen, 1999:52). Public journalism is driven by the same ideals that drive deliberative democracy in that it “advocates changes in techniques of newsgathering and reporting to foster more public deliberation and civic engagement (Dzur, 2008:137)”. It was an idea born from the belief that journalism could be “more helpful to civic life” if journalists are willing to consider new ways of using old skills (Rosen, 1999:168). This framework suggests that by employing capacities associated with journalism – listening, interviewing, gathering facts and framing stories – but re-directing these capacities to place citizens at the centre of the news agenda (Rosen, 1999:21) journalists could re-discover the value of the profession to democracy (Rosen, 1999:27). Public Journalism responds to Habermas’s notion of public opinion emerging when a “free press” assisted citizens to participate in the “reasoned discussion” that was necessary in order for citizens to “decide among themselves what direction their affairs should take (Rosen, 1999:62)”.

Public journalism and deliberative democracy are anticipated by Dewey (1927:24) as he perceives of a role for the media to add “new value” to the outcomes of citizens who act together as these outcomes are acknowledged or “observed”. “For notice of the effects of connected action forces men to reflect upon the connection itself; it makes it an object of attention and interest (Dewey, 1927:24)”. This resonates with the conception in public journalism of citizens as “people who have a stake in the news, who want to see the possibilities behind often troubling developments, who want to participate in solving shared problems (Campbell in Rosen, 1999:135)”. In the public journalism frame the media respond to this by telling the story in a different way. The difference starts by the way journalists envisage their audience. Because the media have “embraced (J. W. Carey, 1997b:220)” Lippmann’s vision of a “diminished and

vanishing public (J. W. Carey, 1997b:219)” journalists do not “cultivate certain vital habits (J. W. Carey, 1997b:220)”. These habits include following an argument, grasping opposing points of view, “expand the boundaries of understanding” and considering alternatives (J. W. Carey, 1997b:220).

Lippmann’s vision of journalists “sorting through expert opinion” to “distil” opinions from professionals in politics, business and culture to a public incapable of judging these themselves turned the media into interpreters of “the views of elites and professionals (Friedland, 2003:15)”. This had lasting effect on the professional attitudes and routines of journalists. Implied is an identity of an “expert” as opposed to the identity of a “citizen professional” in a democratic society where a “news culture” is established that encourages journalists to be engaged and “part of the mix”. When political pressure becomes pervasive, journalists’ perceptions of being detached and being objective are often blurred. Objectivity becomes an excuse for remaining detached. Schudson (2003:34) argues that subjectivity in news is “patterned and predictable” and making decisions under the pressures of 24 hour news cycles are dependent on “reliable shorthand, conventions, routines, habits, and assumptions about how, why and where to gather news”. Telling the story in a different way implies a task for journalists to reflect on deeply ingrained values, attitudes and routines, including objectivity. Cunningham (2003:24) argues that objectivity leads to “passive recipients” of news and compromises our ability to analyse and explain news. McQuail (2005:284) cites a survey of US journalists which, in 1971, showed 76% of journalists supporting the notion that it was important for the media to investigate claims and statements made by government. A decade later, in 1982-3, that commitment had dropped to 66%. They were now more in favour of a “neutral-informative” as opposed to a participant role. These perceptions are strongly related to political culture and the extent to which democracy has been consolidated (McQuail, 2005:287). An example of how journalists readily sacrificed objectivity “for the greater good” is at the start of the War in Iraq in 2003. Here the media created – mediated? – a political, economic, cultural and social environment in which divisions became more punctuated and more partisan. Oliver Burkman (in Allen & Zelizer, 2004:6) describes this process of “embedding” as an “astounding PR success” for the Pentagon, because, he says, “reporters used the words ‘we’ and ‘us’ profusely, identifying themselves with the military”. They gave up objectivity because they had “a very personal stake in their unit’s success”, concludes Burkman. Media users depend on the war reporter to inform them of the “breaking news” but they also depend on the media’s connection to politics to know how they are affected and should relate to the world of politics (Croteau & Hoynes, 2003:15).

Providing context for content is a way of emancipating the media user. A deeper understanding of events provides him or her to “make sense of reality” with more authority.

The nature of politics shapes the identity of citizens and how they conceive their civic or political work. If politics is perceived as the work of men who own slaves, men who own slaves participate in political process. If it is perceived as the work of the educated and the “propertied” class, this has implications for how the educated and the rich perceive their political work and how the uneducated and the poor perceive their political work. If democracy is perceived as a job that can only be performed by experts and technocrats, non-experts withdraw or define their political work as something they do in their personal or private capacity. Through deliberation, citizens with citizens, journalists with citizens, not as professionals but as citizens, there is potential for re-conceptualising a public sphere where rational critical debate about what needs to be done to solve common problems becomes the work of everyone in a democratic society.

## Chapter 5: Reflection on application of theory on practice

### 1. Introduction

This study proposes that technocratic and expert-driven approaches to problem solving in democratic societies have an inhibiting effect on active citizenship. The effect of this approach on the relationship between journalists and citizens is of particular importance. Journalists working *with* citizens to ensure that citizens concerns are on the table is important but even more important in this relationship is that journalists provide information that help citizens to act with other citizens to solve problems of common concern.

The work of journalists are weighed down by organisational and structural pressures resulting from an operational framework demanding the freshest news fastest and produced by fewer people. In this milieu journalists opt for sources that are available and carry a stamp of credibility and approval – usually experts in their fields or people in power. Despite their best intentions to be guardians of citizens' interests, this scenario has alienated citizens from journalists. Citizens don't consider journalists as allies but are rather suspicious and cynical of the information they read in newspapers and hear and see on the news. This study suggests that the professional identity of journalists as "guardians" over citizen interests could very well be one of the obstacles in the way of a constructive relationship. The public journalism framework offers some potential to re-conceptualise this relationship. The study proposes that there may be two reasons why citizens are losing interest in political news. A feeling of disempowerment to do anything about public problems is one. Resulting from this is a feeling of disconnectedness from political news in general. Citizen agency has been compromised by "political professionalism". When journalists talk *to* citizens instead of *with* citizens about the problems facing societies, citizens lose interest in the news because they feel that it has no use for them in making the decisions they need to make about the public problems that confront them. More information is necessary on the operational implications of public journalism or pragmatic guidelines to steer the work in newsrooms. These guidelines should be based on more empirical research about the impact of citizen-centred approaches to news production.

This concluding chapter looks at examples of current initiatives which have potential trademarks of re-connecting the civic work of journalists with the civic work of citizens. It also discusses initiatives which look like media connecting with citizens and why these may not live

up to the criteria as proposed. Lastly the study suggests some steps towards broader implementation of the principles of public journalism and some further questions for inquiry. This includes suggestions for an academic framework that could address current shortcomings.

## **2. The potential of public journalism in South Africa**

### **2.1 Tabloids can get citizens talking about other things**

The challenge faced by the South African media in terms of the social responsibility and public interest model is that accountability and objectivity are interpreted differently by different interest groups. Ahead of the July 2007 ANC policy conference delegates from KwaZulu Natal announced their intention to propose a resolution which asks for more state control of the media because, in their view, the media are “generally negative towards the ANC” and what South Africa needs is an “objective” and “generally patriotic” media (Tolsi, 2007). What the media do or not do matters to the South African society. And what they should or should not be doing (McQuail, 2005:218) in the public interest may even be more of a matter for contestation than the potential tension between its public interest role and its role dictated by market forces.

The tabloid market in South Africa has evoked vigorous debate since its entrance to the market in South Africa. This debate relates to this study in two important aspects: The questions posed about ethics and journalism standards relate to the issue of professionalism in general and the professional identity of journalists in particular. It further raises the matter of the responsibility of tabloids in a democratic society (Wasserman, 2006:60) which speaks to issues raised in this study in terms of deliberative democracy and public journalism.

Tabloids reach an enormous readership. According to figures by the Audit Bureau of Circulations of South Africa (ABC) (Patterson, 2010), the top two daily newspapers in the country in terms of copy sales are what is known as “tabloids”. Despite a year on year reduction in copy sales of almost 14 percent (figures reported August 2010), the Daily Sun sells more than 430 000 newspapers a day which is three and a half times more than its nearest competitor. The nearest competitor, Son, sells more than 120 000 newspapers a day and showed a year on year growth of almost eighty percent. These figures demonstrate that readers find content in tabloid newspapers that are far more appealing than what is on offer in mainstream newspapers. Unlike publications like Hello and People that ascribe their high circulation figures to their entire

devotion to gossip news and about superstars and royalty, the Daily Sun and Son offers the usual variety of news that one would find in mainstream papers but “coloured in” with the provocative and in your face style which characterizes the tabloid industry. The successful way in which tabloids in South Africa seems to have won the trust of readers, says Wasserman, requires reflection on the part of the mainstream media in terms of their “dominant normative frames (2006:68)”. This includes reconsidering notions of “independence and neutrality”, the nature of their “involvement in transformation or development” and the “concept of ‘public interest’ (Wasserman, 2006:68-72)”.

This study suggests that the tabloid press in South Africa holds tremendous potential for exploring some of the practices proposed in the public journalism framework. Tabloids have managed to connect with citizens in communities who by and large regard themselves as falling outside the target of mainstream newspapers and its style of reporting requires reporters to get out of the office and off their cell phones and into people’s homes and communities – a rare occurrence in editorial offices of most mainstream newspapers. If tabloids could add, in their practice and routines, ways of systematically involving citizens, not just in describing and complaining about their problems but also forcing them, through modes of framing stories and other devices as suggested previous chapters, to consider what they can do with other citizens to solve these problems, the potential for an invigorated public sphere is tremendous. The (relatively) new audience of the tabloid market will remain consumers of, rather than actors in, the public sphere. In the words of Wasserman:

*“If basics are at stake, they are the basic values of the development of a deliberative democracy, the transformation of society and the redress of inequalities (2006:68)”.*

The debate about the nature of professionalism in the media sparked by the emergence of the tabloid tradition in South Africa is also constructive. This has the potential to generate constructive discussion about the nature of journalism education and about the normative frames which dominate current journalism practice in mainstream media. The debate catalysed by the tabloids also points to “deep-seated differences of opinion about the media’s role in post-apartheid South Africa (Wasserman, 2006:67)”.

The tabloid press, which proved to be hugely profitable, forced mainstream papers to adjust their choice for content and the way they frame content to get their share of this lucrative

cake. This includes critical and in-depth analyses of party policies and political reporting that extend beyond election days (Fine, Van Houten, & Roberts, 2007:4).

## **2.2 Lead SA: a step in the right direction**

On August 4, 2010 South Africa's Primedia Broadcasting and Independent Newspaper Group launched Lead SA ("Media organisations launch Lead SA," 2010). Involving four popular commercial radio stations and four newspapers this initiative called on South Africans to "look within and be the change they want to see ("Media organisations launch Lead SA," 2010)". Building on the optimism and positive attitudes among ordinary citizens during the World Cup Football event staged in the country in the preceding months, a pledge by the organizers urged South Africans to view the success of the football tournament as an accomplishment for all citizens and to affirm this success with continuing through caring about themselves, their families, neighbours, friends, colleagues and "about South Africa ("Lead SA call to action," 2010)". The issues addressed so far as part of the initiative – organisers are adamant that Lead SA is not a "campaign" – include rhino poaching, encouraging citizens to volunteer at hospitals during the public servant strike, becoming involved in anti-crime and anti-litter projects.

In terms of civil society theory Lead SA shows potential on a number of levels that could enrich the conversation in South Africa's public sphere. The media involved ensures constant affirmation and acknowledging of public action taking on new meaning when it is observed as discussed in previous chapters. While it does not facilitate a deliberative discussion in the classic structure of forums or groups coming together to identify problems, naming and framing these problems in their own terms and coming to agreement about best options for action, it does facilitate some conversation between citizens through which options do emerge for "conjoint behaviour" in the Deweyan sense (also discussed in the previous chapters). Lead SA challenges the expert-professional identity of the presenters at the radio stations and the journalists at the newspapers. Lead SA forces the journalists involved (the broader media community) to reflect on the meaning of objectivity in the face of their active involvement in promoting a certain stance on issues. By inviting citizens to become involved and also providing platforms where citizens can share their experiences the journalists are forging a different kind of engagement with citizens than merely reporting on or about the same issues.



Some of the questions arising from this initiative include the way in which Primedia and the Independent group developed the initiative. It is not clear how much citizens were involved in developing, for example, “the pledge” which citizens are asked to sign. Indications are that citizens were not involved in conceptualising the initiative. If the terms of the initiative have been developed through a deliberative process it could have been a powerful example of the media providing citizens with opportunities to frame problems in their own language and imagine solutions to these problems with other citizens. For now, the tone of the initiative remains one of “I can” instead of “we can”.

### **3. What public journalism is not**

Compare Lead SA to another media initiative, the makeover reality TV show, Extreme Makeover Home Edition (EMHE). In terms civil society theory, discussed in earlier chapters, EMHE is a classic example of media taking action *for* citizens and “corporate volunteerism (McMurria, 2008:306)”. The show features a team of television presenters or “design team (McMurria, 2008:306)” who choose families with a recent history of bad luck and rebuild their homes. The show has numerous corporate sponsors whose trade names feature prominently throughout the rebuilding of the homes reflecting a media version of the “restructured corporate philanthropy” in the United States which “integrate corporate giving with product marketing (McMurria, 2008:309)” . Apart from the corporate sponsorship of the products used in the new houses, the network featuring EMHE, ABC, “synergistically” integrates Disney, its corporate parent, in that the winning family gets sent to one of the Disney theme parks across the United States while their home is “made over (McMurria, 2008:310)”. EMHE and other similar shows in the “cultural and economic contexts” of a “neoliberal political consensus (2008:307)”, McMurria demonstrates how “master neoliberal narratives of privatization and personal responsibility (2008:320)” characterise the makeover reality show.

*“EMHE recipients are presented as model citizens and deserving families whose problems are not fault of their own. EMHE families conform to the ideals of neoliberal citizenship through working long hours in moderate- to low-paying service sector jobs with inadequate health coverage without complaint. These families solve problems within the privatized sphere of the family by calling on extended family members to help with daycare or care for sick or disabled kin while both parents work.”*

In terms of the frameworks presented in this study, EMHE poses a number of problematic approaches to notions of civic work of citizens and the civic work of the media. To start with, EMHE forces citizens to explore their problems – which are often the result of common problems faced by hundreds of other citizens – in terms of a winning position. If they can send in a video which portrays their problems as the most deserving they get the new house. This is a fundamentally disempowering incentive for reflecting on problems in an individualistic frame and unrelated to the concerns of other citizens. It further promotes a depoliticised problem solving mode that perpetuates a disconnection with the broader context of societal problems. In terms of the media EMHE is a classic example of the well-intentioned but disempowering professional approach that puts citizens in the role of passive recipients and the expert professional in the role of the active saviour with the know all to do something about public problems which “ordinary citizens” can’t fully grasp.

#### **4. The potential of HIV and AIDS communication to energise the public sphere**

For the last 10 years I have been working in the field of HIV and AIDS Communication. During this time, I have watched in frustration how, what could have been, and more importantly, what should have been a conversation between citizens and policy makers, planners, people with power to change things, remained a conversation between the well-intentioned experts in the aid and funding community and expert – and often opportunistic – politicians and bureaucrats – state and non-state. I have watched how, instead of challenging the course of this conversation, journalists often become the channels for UNAIDS, USAID and Bill and Melinda Gates to talk to and on behalf of citizens to Departments of Health and AIDS Councils and Presidents and celebrities with an attitude which Donaldo Macedo aptly describes in his foreword to Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of Freedom*: “There is no need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself (Freire, 2001:xxvi)”.

As a journalist I have always been fairly suspicious of the language of communication for development or communication for social change. I notice the same suspicion when engaging journalists – now from the side of the suspects. I want to believe that their suspicion, like mine, stem from an intuitive mistrust of the marketing and evangelical jargon that is characteristic of some versions of communication for development. More importantly, my experience of these models, that remains expert-driven despite the best intentions, is that they continue to be

disempowering in that, instead of “providing sites where citizens can engage in the political process (Jacobs, 2002:9-10)” they demobilize people and limit their participation in self-determining decision making.

Drawn in to the modes of development speak, journalists seem unprepared to ask the why and the how questions. Without feeling their “objectivity” or “neutrality” compromised, journalists attend thousands of training sessions telling them how to “name” the pandemic, how to refer to the people who are sick, which photographs to use, what the gender issues are and how poverty fits into the overall picture. While these are important issues to address, this perpetuates reporting practices which centre on the “thin edge” of the development story. Journalists seem content for the HIV and AIDS conversation to be dictated by the development and funding marketers and evangelists. Infections rates continue to rise. Ordinary citizens seem unmoved by these event-driven and statistical reports about unfathomable numbers of new infections and deaths. Journalists tell me that editors are not interested in publishing stories about HIV. Editors tell me readers are not interested in reading stories about HIV.

Despite being declared a national emergency in many countries in Sub-Sahara Africa, the Afrobarometer survey which measures household perceptions about the quality of governance and democracy in 20 African countries, could not find one country in which citizens rated HIV and AIDS as the top problem on the development agenda – unemployment yes, poverty yes, food shortage, yes but not HIV and AIDS ("Key findings about public opinion in Africa," 2002:1). This does not mean the problem does not exist or does not exist as a stark reality in the lives of the infected and affected. The statistics are validated when you talk to ordinary people. They tell the stories of loved ones who die. People talk of attending more funerals than they used to. In rural areas more and more burial services are the eerie reminders that the statisticians were correct. The problem is that most of the stories which journalists tell somehow leave most citizens who consider themselves unaffected – at least unaffected enough to continue to have multiple partners, unprotected sex. It even provides space for politicians to say they do not know anyone who has died of AIDS and that a shower after unprotected sex could be protection from contracting the virus.

There is clearly a disconnect between the conversation about HIV and AIDS as conducted by the funders, aid agencies and health activists – the experts – and the conversation as conducted by citizens. One conversation takes place in terms of acronyms – PLWAs instead of people living with AIDS and OVCs instead of orphans and vulnerable children – and “rights

based approaches” while another conversation is about how to care for sick people if they don’t want to take their medicine or what to do with children whose parents are sick or have died. Journalists are covering numerous conferences and press briefings and reporting the statistics and launch of new prevention programmes and policies. On the odd occasion they even tell a story from a “human angle”. Despite indications that the HIV and AIDS conversation is an important one, journalists, for the most part, seem to be happy for the conversation to be dictated by the very funders and development agents they do not trust. While remaining suspicious in the corridors, they are seduced by the simplicity of reducing HIV and AIDS to statistics and sensation. Safely ensconced by the easy access to these themes that generate copy, journalists seem to lack the courage to tell an important story in a way that is compelling enough to make a difference.

But what is “compelling enough to make a difference”?

This question takes me one step back and out of the HIV and AIDS arena to examine the general relationship between citizens and journalists. To tell compelling stories journalists turn to people, not institutions or organisations. That is Journalism 101. To tell stories that make a difference, journalists do not quote statistics or regurgitate press releases. But for journalists to want to talk to people about HIV and AIDS they need to believe that people have a story to tell which is worth more than the stories from officials at the Department of Health or the Presidency or UNAIDS. They need to value the narratives that come from ordinary citizens who live in ordinary houses and sometimes in less than ordinary circumstances. It is worth quoting James Carey again:

*“The god term of journalism – the be-all and end-all, the term without which the entire enterprise fails to make sense – is the public. Insofar as journalism is grounded, it is grounded in the public”*

What is wanting in the relationship between citizens and journalists is the ingredients to build habits of participative and informed political discussion. The theoretical frameworks proposed in this study to re-conceptualise this relationship suggests implications for the way journalism education and training is currently conceived.

At one of the sessions at the 2009 Highway Conference in Grahamstown, South Africa – a gathering of media workers from across the African continent – a media panellist representing

a public broadcaster<sup>6</sup> responded to a question on the use of new media in elections in the context of citizens getting more and more confident to use technology to inform other citizens. “We must make sure citizens don’t beat us at our own game,” he said. In response I quote Paulo Freire: “This type of speaking from the top down is in itself a clear demonstration of the absence of a democratizing mentality, the absence of the intention to speak ‘with’ (Freire, 2001:103).”

Unless journalists speak “with” citizens about HIV and AIDS, or any other of the big common challenges that face communities, “the media of communication” in the words of James Carey, will continue to be “sites of competition and conflict” and communities will continue attempts to “seize newspapers and other journals to lay down definitions of group life, identity and purpose (1997:32)”.

## **5. Educating journalists to do civic work in a democratic and development context**

James Carey proposes that there is a lack of interest to include “civic virtues” and the “intellectual and literary capacities that good journalists must possess” in curricula (Adam, 1997:268). Evidence shows that journalism departments, while assuming a democratic and civic role for journalists, do not necessarily have a systematic approach in teaching the connection between social issues, public life and the role of the media to present “quality information ... in a manner that allows a deliberative process to continue beyond the story itself (Kurpius, 2003:3)”.

There are two challenges in the quest for quality journalism education in the development context in Africa. Both stem from the challenge Fourie (2005:152) poses: to “train and educate the journalistic mind towards a critical understanding of the profession and its role in the world and as part of humanity”. The first challenge is an education that brings into being journalists who are “agents of cultural and political socialisation”. (Claassen, 2001:9) The second challenge is to instil intellectual skills that would equip journalists with theoretical evidence to consider the potential threat of corporate pressure to undermine journalistic integrity.

Like Carey, Fourie (2005: 142) argues that raising the quality of journalism practice requires “a more fundamental approach” from journalism educators to understand journalism and the work of journalists. Fourie calls for a greater focus on “intellectual skills” over and above the

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<sup>6</sup> Personal notes available on request

current focus which is largely on professional skills. Among the intellectual skills Fourie proposes are skills of reasoning, persuasion, contextualisation, “historical thinking”, interpretation and evaluation”.

In deconstructing cultural, agent, political and socialisation as proposed by Claassen, we get closer to the implications of this concept for journalism education. For cultural, dictionaries offer “educational”, “edifying”, “enlightening” and “enriching”. Another description for agent is: “the means by which an effect or result is produced”. Sardar and Van Loon (2000: 8) contend that our sense of identity – the way we speak, think, form relationships, etc. – is shaped by the media. If you conflate this statement with the dictionary meanings of cultural agent, there may be a simple case for an education that equips journalists to enrich and enlighten people in the way they speak, think, etc. But when you add “political socialisation” the picture gets a little more complex. Going through the same dictionary exercise with “political” and “socialisation” concepts like “taking sides” and “learning to be part of society” emerge. This adds a whole new dimension to training and educating the “journalistic mind towards a critical understanding of the profession and its role in the world as part of humanity”.

In the African development context relatively young democracies have to grapple with a number of media issues: state control, corporate control, using and accessing new technologies and service to a market that often consists of diverse languages and cultures. While there is a strong media tradition in Africa, this tradition tends to have followed the colonial models and even tend to be mostly in English or French or Portuguese. There is also an urban vs. rural media divide which is not so pronounced in North America and Western Europe where most of journalism theories have been and are conceptualised.

Journalists in Africa have to be able to operate in far less homogenous societies than their counterparts in the so-called developed world. In this context “taking sides” can mean a number of things. Journalists need to make choices; they have to take sides in the how and the where of educating and enriching and enlightening. Their education therefore has to prepare them to make these choices and be part of the society in which they will be writing. Their education needs to give them the ability to transfer to their readers a sense of what Hirsch and others call “cultural literacy (Hirsch in Claassen, 2001: 5)”.

In the African development and democratic context Rhodie’s contention (1992:119 in Claassen, 2001:14) that journalism cannot “exist on a foundation of narrow vocationalism” rings

especially true. In Africa, journalists are agents of cultural and political socialisation and the environment demands constant consideration of how the political economy impacts on the media's ability to build Habermas's "public sphere for rational debate". In the African development context it is in the interest of an unconsolidated democratic tradition to build a respectable and credible tradition of journalism. This requires journalists that engage with their communities and who make conscious choices to claim a role in creating wider public spheres for rational debate on the particular issues that affect this continent.

There are many questions that still have to be answered to fully consider the role of the media, and by implication journalism education, in a democratic and development context. Further considerations include the role of the media in building citizen agency to tell their own stories in equally or more compelling ways than superstars like Bono or Geldof or the economically and politically powerful like Bill Gates and Bill Clinton. Citizens need to ask journalists and journalists need to ask of themselves why they are easier seduced by the celebrity voice than by the community voice. What do the media do to champion the complexities of local economic, social and cultural needs of their communities and are their stories forcing policy makers to be lead by community experience?

Another broader and equally challenging issue is how to identify and address the particular education challenges on the African continent. This requires, first an investigation of what exists, what works, what doesn't work and why. With this information journalism and development communication scholars can work as a united front to create modules and programmes that are particularly appropriate to this context and that still find resonance in the global world of journalism

McAfee (2000:7) proposes that we think about the evolution of the liberal and humanist traditions not as "an era of history" but rather as "a project". This study proposes three frameworks to consider for taking this "project" further at this point of our history. The re-conceptualisation proposed here requires "critical attention" to practice and a belief that in news organizations, in professions, the academy and in politics "things can be changed (Hartley, 1982:9)".

At the end of an episode from Monty Python's Flying Circus (Gilliam, 1972) the "news reader" recounts a sequence of nonsensical events pretending to be news. Unless journalists re-conceptualise their relationship with citizens in terms of their political role in democratic

process, the information they provide could potentially turn out to be as useful as the litany dished up in this spoof.



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